

**“Made in God’s Companionable Image”
Spirit of Peace UCC**

Genesis 1: 26-28a & Genesis 2: 15-25

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My deep appreciation to Rev. Dr. Barbara Lundblad who’s sermon “Do Women Have More Ribs Than Men?” served as the base for this sermon. She provided the gift, I provided the wrapping paper and ribbon.

‘Tis the season of Easter...and I feel like raising something from the dead. Spring just has that affect on me...when the world around me is waking up with signs of new life...leaves and flowers and robins sitting on nests and baby bunnies and calves...I, too, seem to feel the Christ consciousness of the promise of new life pouring through me, so I am inclined to want to perform miracles...and raise something from the dead.

That’s quite a set up for a sermon, isn’t it?

Because it is Integrity of Creation Sunday on the UCC calendar, I’ve decided to roll away the stone and raise the classic creation texts from their tomb of neglect. Now, some of you might argue the these texts aren’t dead and neglected...we know them quite well...some of us can almost say parts of them by heart...but, I’m pretty sure that if we engage the text with new eyes and open hearts, new life will spring forth.

So, listen with me as the Spirit moves through these familiar texts.

Genesis 1: 26-28a

And God said, “Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.” So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female God created them. God blessed them.

Genesis 2: 15-25

The Lord God took the man and put hi in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it. And the Lord God commanded the man, “You may freely eat of every tree of the

garden; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall die.”

Then the Lord God said, “it is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper as his partner.” So out of the ground the Lord God formed every animal of the field and every bird of the air, and brought them to the man to see what he would call them; and whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name. The man gave names to all cattle, and to the birds of the air, and to every animal of the field; but for the man there was not found a helper as his partner. So the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and he slept; then God took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. And the rib that the Lord God had taken from the man God made into a woman and brought her to the man.

Then the man said, “This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; this one shall be called Woman, for out of Man this one was taken.”

Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and clings to his wife, and they become one flesh. And the man and his wife were both naked, and were not ashamed.

Will you pray with me...*May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable to you, O God...may your word and spirit breathe new life into our living. Amen.*

I know me...if I had written the Bible, I would have cleaned it up. I would have wanted to select every word carefully, for I love my God, my faith and words...but I would also have strived for efficiency...keeping the message tight. I would have gotten rid of contradictions and differences and confusing stuff...like the birth stories in Luke and Matthew...couldn't they have been merged into one...then the magi could have been at the manger at Christmas instead of waiting until Epiphany. And surely one resurrection story would be better than four different ones...with different people coming and going from the tomb...details in each story very different from the others...why not just one? Get rid of the other three.

Of course, I'd want to start at the very beginning...because if you read Genesis chapter 1 and Genesis chapter 2, it becomes clear rather quickly that there are two creation stories. Try, hard as you want, you will never harmonize the two. Male

and female were either created at the same moment...or the man was created first and then woman.

Thankfully, I did not write the Bible. It truly is an amazing thing that different stories...different voices...about the same person or event are allowed to stand side by side in the text. Surely these voices can only enrich our experience of Scripture. The Bible begins with the first creation story. “In the beginning, when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters.” That is glorious poetry. It’s a call to worship...praise to God...doxology...not biology...not science. The beginning of the Bible is a call to worship, with one refrain echoing another. It sounds like a litany we might say in worship... “and there was evening and there was morning, the first day...and there was evening and there was morning the second day”...on and on to the sixth day.

On the sixth day, God said “Let us make humankind in our image according to our likeness.” Interesting...God doesn’t seem to be alone. Let *us* make humankind in *our* image after *our* likeness.

Theologian Martin Buber remarked about the plural pronouns this way, “In the beginning was relation. Not only God who longed to be, but God who longed to be with...even within God’s self.”

So God created humankind in God’s image, in God’s image they were created...male and female...God created them...all at once...both together...two genders...in the image of God, male and female...”and it was evening and it was morning, the sixth day.”

And on the seventh day God rested...but not for long. Turn the page and in Chapter 2: 4, the story starts over again...not so much poetry as prose.

“In the day that God made the earth and the heavens”...

This is not liturgy. This is storytelling. This is the opening sentence of a story. And, almost every biblical scholar says that this story, the creation story from Genesis chapter two, is the older story... scholars can date text by the language...words that are used. If I had written the bible, the second story would have come first so you could read them in order...but thankfully, the sages and the wind of the Spirit said the Bible should begin with a call to worship...praising our Creator God.

In the second creation story, God is more intimate...God seems to be walking around with the creatures of earth...although there weren't any creatures in this story...until God made one creature...God begins by creating this earth creature called *Adam*...and God breathes into this creature the breath of life and places the man in a garden. It's a beautiful story.

Then we come to this text. "God said, it is not good that the man should be alone...I will make him a helper as his partner." Then God formed all the animals to give company to the man...God formed all the animals out of the dust of the earth...just like the human...but God didn't breathe into them. The storyteller seems to be suggesting there is some kind of closer connection between God and this human creature.

And then we come to a fun part...God says to the man, "I want you to name all of these animals and birds"...we don't know who named the fish...but the man sets about his task. This tall fellow, I shall call it giraffe...oh, and look at this cuddly, cuddly creature I shall call kitten...rhinoceros...humming bird...on and on and on until all of the animals and birds of the earth were named.

I think God was watching the whole process with Godlike intuition...and God knew they weren't enough...the animals and birds weren't enough to keep Adam from being lonely...and so in what may be the first example of surgery that we have...God put the man to sleep and removed one of his ribs...closed up the incision...and from that rib formed another human creature...and brought her to the man. Adam looked at this creature and said, "This at last is bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh." (You know, not so much later in Genesis, Laban will say almost these exact words when he meets his nephew Jacob. He says, "Surely you are bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh. You are like me. You are my kin.")

Adam had never seen another human being...only giraffes and kittens and humming birds...but when he saw this other creature that God had made...it was then that he said, "Oh here at last, it is someone like me"...and his loneliness is over...for God who longed to be with also knew that *Adam*, this earth creature in whom God had breathed life, also longed to be with.

Oh, there have been so many discussions through the ages about whether a woman had more ribs than a man...or whether there was an evenness in the ribs or whether there were more ribs in one side of the man...or if God evened it out in the course of making the woman...this was of course before X-rays.

But you know, science has a way of straightening out all kinds of confusions...and once there was the study of human anatomy it was clear that the woman and the man had the same number of ribs. But, scientific discoveries also had a way of **interfering** with the bible...because I don't think this text was trying to answer scientific questions. It was meant to do something else entirely different. Yet, these verses have been quoted as a kind of scientific certainty...about the binary heterosexual ordering of creation. Even if this isn't an attempt to be scientific, some now look to it as God's intention for the way all creatures are ordered.

We are asking biological questions of a text that is not fundamentally about biology. I believe this is a story, at its heart, about God's nature...God's longing for companionship, partnership, rather than loneliness. Therefore...there is always a therefore... "Therefore, a man leaves his father and his mother and clings to his wife and they become one flesh."

Did you notice that the language is a little bit different here? It is almost like a moral from one of Aesop's fables gets dropped into the text. There weren't any children yet. What would be the meaning of a father and a mother...and there surely hadn't been any marriage...so what was the meaning of the word "wife"? It is as if the sentence got dropped in...and then the storyteller comes back in his own voice and says "the man and the woman were naked and unashamed."

What fascinates me about this sentence that has been dropped into the text is that it puts a whole new spin on how weddings should be conducted...and I don't mean just the naked part...although can you imagine the Bible requiring naked weddings? Not that part...I mean a wedding that would be patterned after this text in Genesis 2. Picture it.

A man shall leave his father and his mother and cling to his wife. So, if I were a minister presiding at rehearsal, I would begin by giving general instructions...and I would say something like... "This is how a wedding *should* be done...the bride and the bridesmaids will all be standing here in the front, facing the back door...awaiting the groom... "a man shall leave his father and his mother"...the music is playing...and then, one by one the groomsmen would come up the aisle...I don't know what they would be holding...maybe flowers...it would depend a lot on the groom and what was important to him...because, after all, he had given a great deal of attention to the details of planning his wedding. So, they come slowly, slowly to the front...and then they turn and face the back door...and all are awaiting the groom...who comes forward with his father and his mother...and when they get to the front I would say, "Who giveth this man to be

married to this woman?” And then the groom’s mother would say, “His father and I do.” And then they would kiss their son on the cheek and give his hand tenderly to his wife...I mean bride...who will become his wife...to whom he will cling.

Can’t you just see the expression on the wedding planners face?!? But...I suspect...somewhere in the midst of my instructions, somebody will surely speak up, “Pastor, please, we don’t need to take the Bible *that* literally on this.”

Interesting...it is this same verse, the one that seems to be dropped in, that Jesus quotes in both Matthew and Mark. In both cases, Jesus is speaking against divorce. He expands on the Genesis text, saying this, “So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore, what God has joined together, let no one separate.”

Then he goes on to say some very clear words against divorce...words that are very hard for many people to hear... “I say to you whoever divorces his wife...except for unchastity...and marries another, commits adultery”...that is, breaks one of the commandments of God. That is Matthew. In Mark, there is no unchastity clause. It’s just whoever divorces...Jesus seems really clear on this.

This is so confusing, because in most mainline Protestant denominations...the Catholic church...the Episcopalians...there is room for divorce...even the clergy can divorce. The clergy’s gifts for ministry are affirmed...and their longing for companionship is affirmed...they are even allowed to divorce and remarry...and yet it isn’t really biblically accurate.

I bring this up because there are many denominations that seem to be confused and afraid of ordaining homosexuals, ordaining partnered gay and lesbian people...and there is great fear around gay marriage in general. We have churches jumping ship from one denomination to another out of fear that embracing homosexuals into the full life and ministry of the church is not being faithful to God’s Word.

So, I am left wondering now, if congregations who have left their denominations...be they UCC, Episcopalians, Lutherans... to become a part of denominations that are perceived as more biblical, longing to protect the sanctity of the Word of God...will they allow clergy who are divorced and remarried to continue to serve as clergy?

Will they turn away people who are divorced and hoping to be married again...will they be turned away to protect God’s word? That would be very sad. That would protect no one...and it surely wouldn’t protect God...for God has said from the

beginning...from the very beginning... “It is not good for you to be alone...I will make for you a partner.”

People long for relationship...long for companionship...Genesis 2 is about human relationship, not human anatomy. This text is not about the number of ribs or whether they are even on both sides...this text does not affirm or disaffirm gay marriage...the writers of Genesis wouldn't have had any notion of what that would be! But this text *does affirm* the goodness of human companionship...and the formation of new families.

I recognize that this is a little bit scary...maybe even very...scary to lots of people...change...different definitions...new voices...new ways of thinking about things. But we do need to ask ourselves this very important question: What is it about humanity that reflects the image and nature of God? This morning I would suggest it is not the gender of the two people who commit to one another as partners. I would suggest it is the faithfulness and love that they have for one another...it is the promise of help, support, partnership and love that binds two people together...not anatomy.

My friends, may we experience the Spirit of new life and new possibilities at work in us as open ourselves to new understandings of what it means to be created in God's companionable image...and may we respect love wherever we see it...and may we respect that what God joins together, we should not, out of fear, tear asunder. May it be so for you and for me. Amen.