

## ***God Created. And then What?***

Genesis 1:1-5

The Reverend Erica Wimber Avena

January 10, 2021

Prayer: *Great God, make your voice plain as you strengthen us to face the problems and possibilities of our lives. Grant us your peace and bless us with your strength...*

One of the silver linings of this pandemic has been creativity. You might notice, every now and then, a flourishing of human creativity. Someone does some creative work around. Over Christmas I discovered friends who were quilting, knitting, woodworking, star gazing, recording music, journaling, baking, doing photography, making collages and scrapbooks, writing memoirs and the list goes on.

- Scientists worldwide work to create a vaccine for the novel Coronavirus – a creative scientific project shared worldwide
- In 1665 London was practicing social distancing during the plague and sent all of their students home for the year. Sir Isaac Newton was one of them and he used the time well, he later called it his “*annus mirabilis*” “the year of wonders.” He laid out the foundations for calculus, began his theories on optics, and described the theory of gravity, with the inspiration from the apple tree in his yard.
- Another solitary endeavor was by Wilson Bentley (1865-1931) who became fascinated with photographing the snowflakes around him in Jericho, Vermont. So abundant, so stunning in their differences. He said: “...I have yet found no exact duplicate. In this in- exhaustive storehouse of crystal treasures, what a delight is in store for all future lovers of snowflakes. And of the beautiful in nature.” He was the first one to photograph a snowflake, and he went on to photograph over 5000, never finding two exactly alike.



For our regulars, you will know that last Sunday, Rev. Susan Izard, our Minister of Spiritual Life, shared an excellent sermon at the end of the Christmas season on the prologue to the gospel of John, “wisdom anchors” was her sermon title and it was on John’s chapter 1. John offers a poetic and theological rendering of the creation story where the uncreated, eternal elements are the word, “in the beginning was the word” and Jesus, who speaks the word. And so you have a paradox right from the beginning, the eternal is also this mortal individual – and the gospel goes on to develop that theme. Jesus is the light of the world, the one who faces rejection, but is not overcome by rejection, as the light is not overcome by darkness, Jesus blesses the world. We may find blessing in Christ, in that good word.

I appreciated her encouraging us to identify those places, stories, people in our lives that anchor our faith and help to ground us in who we are, who God is in our lives, and how God is moving in our world.

I'd like to invite you today to consider the words that are the backstory to John's gospel, to our wisdom anchors, the framework for the 66 books which make up our Bible. John's prologue was written in the first century; I'll invite you to drop with me back even further in history. Genesis chapter 1 is not the oldest part of our Bible, but it lays down the foundational framework, the origin story, for us to understand who God is and who we are, and the elemental order.

And before I get too far into this, I'd like to say parenthetically, for all of you that this is not science. Modern science emerged during the enlightenment, in the 1600's. If you are looking for a book about faith and science allow me to recommend Ian Barbour's hugely influential book: *Religion and Science: historical and contemporary issues*, winner of the Templeton prize.<sup>1</sup> This is a very interesting area of study.

Genesis was written previous to scientific method, and without concern for questions of science. Genesis is asking questions of faith, meaning, and purpose which is a different agenda entirely.

The first act in Genesis is an act of creativity. In the beginning when God created... The essence of the creative spirit, the spirit of God hovers over primordial waters while the earth is without form, and it is this spirit, which together with the spoken word forms matter from nothing, setting electrons on their axis', the laws of nature and the genetic code, and the mystery of space, what we see and its dark matter.

God is the creator, creatively God created the creation, the world around us, the scriptures, Jesus himself, and us – each of us are wonders of creation. More wonderful than snowflakes, more capacity for good, more ability to love and to have a positive impact. In God's image, God created. Part of the image of God is creativity – there's more, but part of it is creative capacity. Which each of us have.

One of my favorite celebrations of creativity is depicted in George Bernard Shaw's play, *Saint Joan*. Which is the story of Joan of Arc. Historically she appeared before an inquisition, and in the play she tells her inquisitor that she hears voices sometimes. He says, "How do you mean? Voices?" She says, "I hear voices telling me what to do. They come from God." The Inquisitor will not allow a young girl dressed in men's clothing to have direct revelation from God so he says, "they come from our imagination." And she delivers one of the great quotes of history, with exasperation and an eye role, at this old man's silly comment she says: "Of course...that is how the messages of God come to us."

At the beginning, there wasn't fear, there weren't threats, no one despaired. At the beginning, there was creativity.

The Christian tradition has a long and proud history in creative arts: visual, musical and artistic. And it isn't over, people are still composing music, making sculpture, paintings, murals, inspired by faith – inspiring others to faith, to find their story in the story.

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<sup>1</sup> *Religion and Science: historical and contemporary issues* Ian Barbour, HarperCollins revised ed. 1997

Like many of you on Wednesday, I was watching CNN and trying to understand... who are these people at the capitol, how are they motivated, what is the role of the police right now... and what, exactly, is happening? I'm aware that although I've seen the videos and heard the reporting, there are things we don't know and may only know some time in the future. One of the anchors, Van Jones spoke carefully when he said that "some things need to be seen to be believed; and some things need to be believed to be seen." I recognize the echo of the African American religious tradition in those words. We use these words at Easter, about how the early disciples grappled with the empty tomb, not seeing some things (looking in the tomb, not seeing the body) not believing others (that Jesus was risen from the dead). Van Jones was inviting all of us into a moment of creative deliberation on what is happening in our country in this moment.

I am well aware that we don't have all the facts right now. I'm also well aware that it's not all okay. I am committed to helping you to make this church and congregation a safe place for our community, for your creativity and your questions, and a place to formulate new and creative prayers, creative outreach, creative celebration of God's love for this broken world.

God began creatively. Let us enter into this new year, creatively also as we seek to walk in faith.

Happy new year!

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**The snowflake image** shown above is used with permission from the Jericho Historical Society. They were created by Wilson Bentley, a farmer from Vermont who was affectionately known as "Snowflake" Bentley. On January 15, 1885 Bentley "became the first person to photograph a single snow crystal. He would go on to photograph well over 5,000 snow crystals," which were shared in his 1931 book, [\*Snow Crystals\*](#), as well as numerous magazines and scientific journals.

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