

## **Creation: We Are Made in God's Image**

Pastor Vern Christopherson

### **Genesis 1:25-28; 2:4b-9, 15-25**

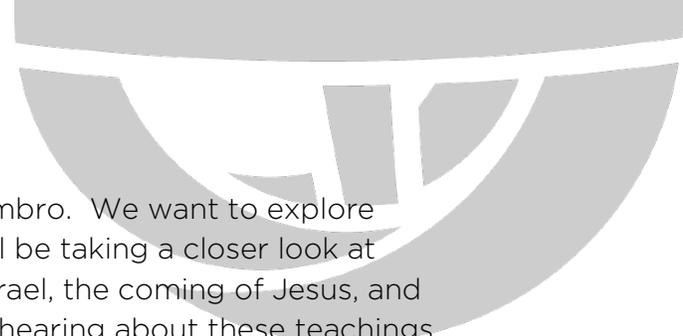
<sup>26</sup>Then God said, "Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth."

<sup>27</sup>So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. <sup>28</sup>God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth."

<sup>24</sup>In the day that the LORD God made the earth and the heavens, <sup>5</sup>when no plant of the field was yet in the earth and no herb of the field had yet sprung up—for the LORD God had not caused it to rain upon the earth, and there was no one to till the ground; <sup>6</sup>but a stream would rise from the earth, and water the whole face of the ground— <sup>7</sup>then the LORD God formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living being. <sup>8</sup>And the LORD God planted a garden in Eden, in the east; and there he put the man whom he had formed. <sup>9</sup>Out of the ground the LORD God made to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food, the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

<sup>15</sup>The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it. <sup>16</sup>And the LORD God commanded the man, "You may freely eat of every tree of the garden; <sup>17</sup>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."

<sup>18</sup>Then the LORD God said, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper as his partner." <sup>19</sup>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 each living creature, that was its name. <sup>20</sup>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. <sup>21</sup>So the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and he slept; then he took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. <sup>22</sup>And the rib that the LORD God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man. <sup>23</sup>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." <sup>24</sup>Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and clings to his wife, and they become one flesh. <sup>25</sup>And the man and his wife were both naked, and were not ashamed.

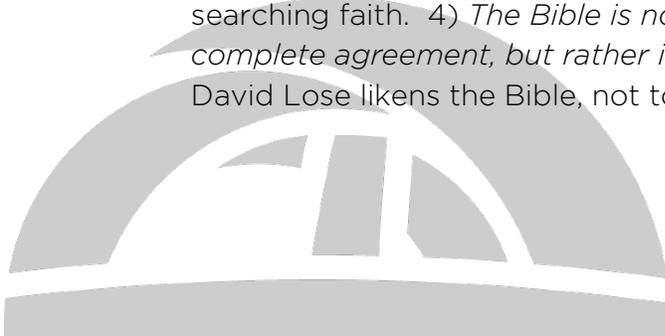


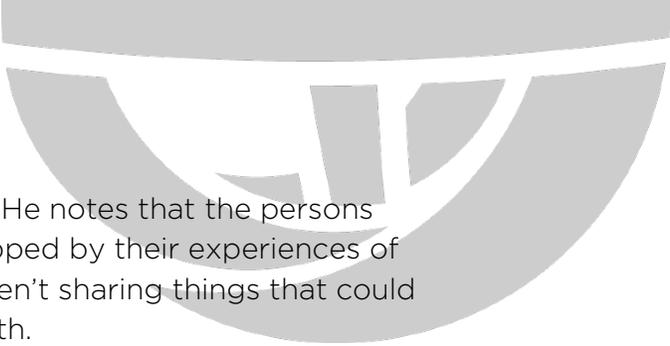
We're going *Back to the Basics* this fall at Zumbro. We want to explore some fundamental parts of the Christian story. We'll be taking a closer look at things like creation, the fall into sin, the journey of Israel, the coming of Jesus, and the start of the early church. Many of us have been hearing about these teachings for all our lives, but that doesn't mean they always make sense to us.

According to David Lose, in his book *Making Sense of the Christian Faith*, our grasp of these teachings is a little like going to the doctor or talking to an auto mechanic. When the experts are talking, we tend to nod our heads in agreement. But that doesn't mean we fully understand what they're saying. It also doesn't mean we can then repeat back what they told us to a friend or family member. Let's be honest, the world is complicated. It's hard to keep track of the things we learn along the way.

As we dig into the basics of our faith, we'll be engaged in something called *theology*. This might sound like a big, complicated term, but it's really not. Theology simply means "words about God." We probably engage in God-talk more than we realize. We say things like: *My daughter really needs to get her baby baptized. I'm praying for God to heal my friend's cancer. I'm hoping Christ will give me the strength I need to make a change in my life.* Whether we ever get around to saying these things out loud, or simply think them, this God-talk has a way of shaping our behavior. Many of us are doing it most every day of our lives.

There are some central convictions that will guide our conversations during this sermon series: 1) *Pastors and teachers don't have all the answers to life's greatest mysteries.* You've maybe already figured this out, but so often we go looking for someone who's smarter than us, for an expert who can help us make sense of things that often don't make much sense at all. Part of our effort this fall will be to get people into classes where they can have discussions with each other – and not just with experts – because faith formation often happens best in community. 2) *Talk about God has a lot less to do with facts and a lot more to do with faith.* We live in a world of facts, and facts are regularly used to bolster our claims about all sorts of things. But quite simply: we can't prove God's existence, or for that matter, we can't prove that God cares one wit about any of us. Now, that doesn't mean there isn't a God, or that God doesn't care. Rather, it means that God's involvement in the world is something we either choose to believe or we don't. 3) *Doubt is not the opposite of faith.* We've said this before, but it bears repeating. So often when we have doubts, our faith feels inadequate. Let me remind you: from the early pages of the Bible, folks like Abraham and Sarah, Moses and Aaron, Peter and Mary have more than their share of doubts. That's not necessarily a bad thing, especially when doubts cause these folks to ask questions. Rather than showing inadequacy, questions are often the mark of a curious, searching faith. 4) *The Bible is not a single book in which everything lines up in complete agreement, but rather it's a lively and diverse collection of 66 books.* David Lose likens the Bible, not to a science or history textbook with all the





answers, but instead to a grandmother's scrapbook. He notes that the persons who wrote the various parts of scripture were so gripped by their experiences of God that they felt like they had to share it. They weren't sharing things that could be proven, but rather were sharing confessions of faith.

With these four convictions in mind, we turn to the one of the first confessions in the entire Bible: *Human beings are created in the image of God*. We are part of God's creative handiwork. Imagine God being an artist, tending to the canvas of creation, working for a while, then stepping back and evaluating, and trying to decide if it's worth keeping.

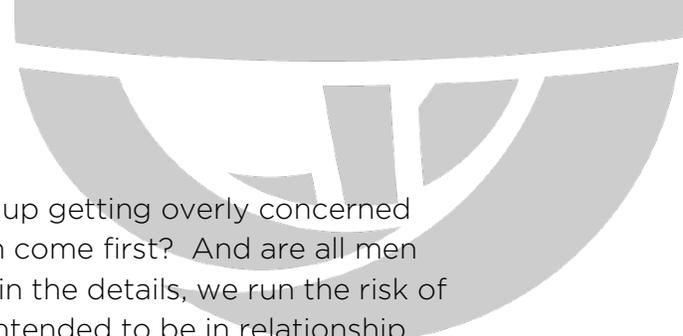
In early August, Brenda and I spent a long weekend on the North Shore of Lake Superior. We made a few stops in Grand Maris. I took a stroll on Artist Point, an island just off the shore. While I was there, I ran into a real-life artist named Paula. I quipped, "It's so nice to finally meet an actual artist on Artist's Point. Paula claimed that she and other artists are there a lot, gaining inspiration to do their work in everything from the rocks and trees, to sailboats and lighthouses. As I watched Paula paint, I couldn't help but think: What was it like for God the Artist to begin the work of creation? Over and over we hear a confession of faith in Genesis that God's creation is good, indeed it is very good.

You may not know this, but actually there are two creation stories in Genesis. In the first story, the one that's probably more familiar, creation happens one day at a time. Some choose to read this story literally, as a scientific explanation of the world which comes into being in six 24-hour days. From my perspective, however, the story is about so much more than that. Creation happens in orderly fashion. Light and darkness, water and land, plants and animals. It climaxes with man and woman being created in the image of God. They're told to be fruitful and multiply, to fill the earth and subdue it, and – quite remarkably – to have dominion over the whole of God's creation. And don't miss the real heart of the story: the Sabbath. God rests. The story implies that we need rest too. And I hesitate to say this, but that rest likely has very little to do with accomplishing more and more, or compulsively checking our emails, or even sitting down to watch the NFL.

In Genesis 2 we get another creation story. This one takes place in a garden. Notice the change in focus. Instead of man and woman being created as the crown of creation, the man comes first – at least "man" in a generic sense. He's fashioned out of the dust of the earth. He's referred to as *adam*, which is very close to the Hebrew word for earth, *adamah*. Man is an earthling. This story isn't so much about dominion as about caretaking. Man is given the responsibility of naming the creatures. I can picture any number of those creatures making an appearance: picas and marmots, coyotes and bears, moose and elk, mountain goats and big horn sheep. One by one they come, but none of them prove to be a suitable partner for *adam*.

So the Lord God causes a deep sleep to fall upon the man. The Lord removes one of his ribs and then uses it to create a woman. Please note: much like





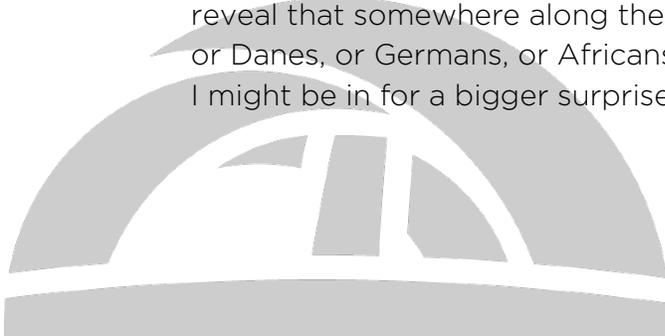
Genesis 1, if you take this story literally, you can end up getting overly concerned with some of the details, such as: Why does the man come first? And are all men short a rib, or only Adam? When we get caught up in the details, we run the risk of missing the point of the story. That is, humans are intended to be in relationship with each other and with God. It's not good for us to be alone. That doesn't mean we don't need alone time, or that introverts have something inherently wrong with them, or that everyone needs to be married. No, it simply means that shouldn't spend all of our time by ourselves. We need people to talk to and care for. We need each other.

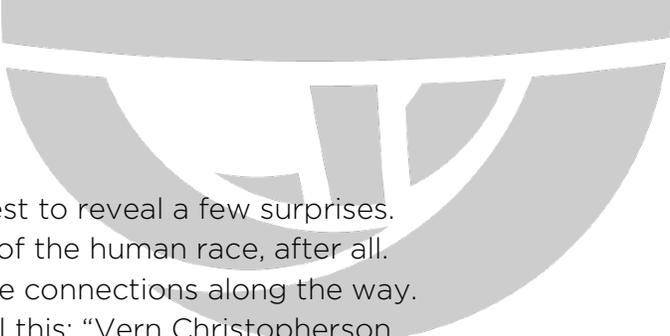
As we read these stories from Genesis, it's easy to get the sense that creation happened long ago and far away. But if we look more closely, we find hints that creation is an ongoing event. And we who are created in the image of God have an important role to play in it. Having dominion isn't about lording it over creation, but rather about looking out for the more vulnerable parts of it – just like the king in ancient Israel was supposed to look out for the vulnerable ones in his dominion. And if we're mindful of our relationships, we'll have a better sense of the importance of caretaking and protecting those people and things that need it most.

So what does it mean to be caretakers of our world? Here's a simple example: Last week I went camping in Rocky Mountain National Park with my son Erik. Like a lot of areas out west, the park was dangerously dry. But there wasn't a fire ban, so we were allowed to have campfires. Our campsite was on the edge of Estes Park. Our fire grate couldn't have been more than 8 feet from a field of dry and brittle grass. One night we started a campfire. The logs soon were crackling and popping. I said to Erik with an urgent tone in my voice, "We need to put out the fire. Whether there's a fire ban or not, I don't want to run the risk of burning down half of Estes Park, Colorado."

David Lose expands what the role of caretaker might look like. "We often think of it as something bigger, more dramatic...but it doesn't have to be," says Lose. "Keeping peace in a family might not be as dramatic as signing a peace treaty, but it advances God's good will and intention for creation. And raising children who care about the earth, or striving to make your place of work more earth-friendly, might not feel as momentous as saving the rainforest, but you're still partnering with God." Lose adds: "There are countless ways, both small and large, that we can join God's work to care for this world."

When I got back from vacation, I had an email waiting for me asking if I wanted to search out my DNA. Someone from the church has been doing this with his family and was wanting to make it available to me. I said yes. Granted, for all of my life I've been told that I'm 100% Norwegian, and I'm fully aware that most people could only dream of such an honor. But who knows, this DNA test might reveal that somewhere along the way my ancestors got mixed in with the Swedes, or Danes, or Germans, or Africans. And considering the track record of the Vikings, I might be in for a bigger surprise than I realize.





Truth be told, I'm sort of expecting my DNA test to reveal a few surprises. And that's okay. It will be good to find out. I'm part of the human race, after all. We are not meant to be alone. There are bound to be connections along the way. What I am not expecting is for the DNA test to reveal this: "Vern Christopherson, you are made in the image of God. God has breathed life into you. God has created you and given you dominion over all of creation. God intends for you to be in partnership with other human beings, and with God too. And in looking after the earth, God want you to be the best caretaker you can be.

So my friends, let me ask, which of these two scenarios seems more significant to you: the DNA testing and the facts to back it up? Or the confession of faith which claims you are made in the image of God? It's not as if one is right and the other is wrong. But clearly they are different.

I invite you to spend some time with this question. How you answer it will most likely impact your life this day, and always. Amen.

