

Genesis 1:1-2:3  
God Created Everything Good  
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How many of you remember your first play? Maybe it was a school production or the Christmas Pageant at church. And do you remember how you went about learning your lines? Maybe you learned the plot line and figured out where you fit, so that at the right moment you could walk onto the stage and say what you had to say.

Imagine for a moment that you didn't have the script and you had no idea about the story. So you're out there on stage making stuff up as you go that isn't at all what the story is about.

This is what it's like not knowing the story of which one is a part. Millions of people don't know the narrative that tells them who they are and what they are to do.

I began last week with a quote from a man named Alasdair MacIntyre. It goes like this: "I (we) cannot answer the question, 'what am I to do?' until we answer the prior question, 'of what story or stories do I find myself a part?'"

This morning, we are beginning a new series of messages that parallel the lessons our children are engaging in Godly Play this fall. I do so for a few reasons. First of all, those of you who have children of that age, I want to give you lots to talk about over lunch today. But more importantly, through these stories, each of us is invited into a grand story. Full of awe and wonder, it is a transformative story, and it's our story, too. It's the story of the Bible.

With our children, we use this word "wonder" very intentionally. Not only are we cultivating an environment where we wonder what the story means, but we're also cultivating an attitude of wonder and awe for the beautiful, majestic, compelling stories of God's Word.

In the weeks between now and the beginning of Advent, we are going to be looking at the stories of the Christian faith that give us the big picture. My hope is that, like a painter who builds up a canvas to reveal the picture in her mind's eye, these stories of beginning, of struggle and fall, of promise, of faithfulness, of unfaithfulness, and of grace will build upon one another, and in the process, before our eyes, this beautiful picture would unfold and draw us into its wonder. Does that sound good? Does that sound just a little bit exciting? I hope so; it's invigorating to me.

This story that we are entering into together does not begin with Jesus, it doesn't even begin with Abraham or Noah, or with Adam and Eve. The place we start this morning is in a time and place before anything at all existed.

So, I invite you to close your eyes and imagine a vast expanse of nothingness, a void formless and without light... that will be easy for you because your eyes are closed. But listen along to the words that I speak and envision an empty canvas beginning to take shape as we start "in the beginning"...

**In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over**

the face of the waters.

And God said, “Let there be light,” and there was light. And God saw that the light was good. And God separated the light from the darkness. God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day.

And God said, “Let there be an expanse in the midst of the waters, and let it separate the waters from the waters.” And God made the expanse and separated the waters that were under the expanse from the waters that were above the expanse. And it was so. And God called the expanse Heaven. And there was evening and there was morning, the second day.

And God said, “Let the waters under the heavens be gathered together into one place, and let the dry land appear.” And it was so. God called the dry land Earth, and the waters that were gathered together he called Seas. And God saw that it was good.

And God said, “Let the earth sprout vegetation, plants yielding seed, and fruit trees bearing fruit in which is their seed, each according to its kind, on the earth.” And it was so. The earth brought forth vegetation, plants yielding seed according to their own kinds, and trees bearing fruit in which is their seed, each according to its kind. And God saw that it was good. And there was evening and there was morning, the third day.

And God said, “Let there be lights in the expanse of the heavens to separate the day from the night. And let them be for signs and for seasons, and for days and years, and let them be lights in the expanse of the heavens to give light upon the earth.” And it was so.

And God made the two great lights—the greater light to rule the day and the lesser light to rule the night—and the stars. And God set them in the expanse of the heavens to give light on the earth, to rule over the day and over the night, and to separate the light from the darkness. And God saw that it was good. And there was evening and there was morning, the fourth day.

And God said, “Let the waters swarm with swarms of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the expanse of the heavens.” So God created the great sea creatures and every living creature that moves, with which the waters swarm, according to their kinds, and every winged bird according to its kind. And God saw that it was good. And God blessed them, saying, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth.” And there was evening and there was morning, the fifth day.

And God said, “Let the earth bring forth living creatures according to their kinds—livestock and creeping things and beasts of the earth according to their kinds.” And it was so. And God made the beasts of the earth according to their kinds and the livestock according to their kinds, and everything that creeps on the ground according to its kind. And God saw that it was good.

Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.”

So God created man in his own image,  
in the image of God he created him;  
male and female he created them.

And 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 heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.” And God said, “Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is on the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit. You shall have them for food. And to every beast of the earth and to every bird of the heavens and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food.” And it was so. And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.

Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them. And on the seventh day God finished his work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all his work that he had done. So God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it God rested from all his work that he had done in creation. These are the generations of the heavens and the earth when they were created, in the day that the Lord God made the earth and the heavens.

I wonder, does what you saw in your mind’s eye strike you as beautiful? When you heard this, did you say to yourself, “Yes, that’s my story, too”? “God created me very good, as well.” Because there are all sorts of narratives, all sorts of stories that people have about themselves and about the world around them.

Someone who grows up in a pressure-packed competitive environment might have the narrative that God expects me to do great things and accomplish mountain-moving feats, because that’s what so-and-so said. Or maybe you grew up in a broken, addicted, abusive family and you think to yourself, God certainly didn’t mean me and my family when he called the humans good. Maybe your narrative was simply average, nothing too great, nothing too horrible, just average. Well, I’m here to tell you that this is not the first word about you, nor is it the last. Your story, our story, begins with four words that I will comment on briefly: “God made everything good.”

Did you hear that refrain throughout? “And it was good”, “and it was good,” “and it was very good.” The God we meet in this creation account is the God who makes, but more importantly makes good.

First, what kind of God do we mean when we say God? What kind of God do we believe in? When these words were written, there were many, many groups of people, and for every group, there were individual gods. There was a saying back then: every family had a fig tree and a god. There was a god of the air, and a god of the ground, a god of the mountains, a god of fertility, and a god of the crops, a god of fire and a god of wind, a god of the moon and a god of the seas and rivers—that god’s name...Yam. Yam.

This sounds silly to us today, right? But in many ways, we have our own gods that we worship. Is *American Idol* still on? Are we still trying to make our lives, our bodies, our careers look like so-and-

so's? What are Brad Pitt and Angelina Jolie up to these days? Do we sometimes take our cues, do we find our meaning—at least in part—from 'gods' around us?

When the book of Genesis opens, verse one says, "in the beginning God." That means something important. There is something altogether different about this God. What the writers believed, the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, was that this God was not a competing God among all the others, but that this was the only God who was above all and in all. The other gods were the invention of the people who believed in them; this God, however, was the inventor of everything that existed.

Yahweh is the God of the heavens above and the earth below. There is none other.

Does this sound presumptuous? Does this sound arrogant? What we will find is that the difference between this God and all the other gods is that while they exert their influence by crushing and destroying, this God exerts his influence through love and mercy.

Psalm 33 says that the heavens are full of God's love. This God delights in mercy. This God chooses to empty himself and humble himself for his enemies. God's inclination toward the world is love. This God chooses to bind himself to one group of people, not because they are better or more loveable than others, but so that through them God would rescue the whole world. They are blessed so that they will be a blessing.

The first action of this God is love, compassion, generosity.

Continuing now, "God...created everything." The Scriptures tell us that this God created *ex nihilo* (out of nothing). That in the beginning, when all that existed was infinite absence, there was this God. Does that thought make your head spin? Does that raise any questions? Anyone ever had this one posed of them: "If God created everything, who created God?"

Everything that has ever been created—every work of art, every sculpture, every great piece of literature—everything has a creator. What "everything that has ever been made" has in common with everything else is that they were all created, even the trees that made the paper, or the block of marble from which Michaelangelo's David was shaped, and the ore that was used to make steel for tall sky scrapers. Everything has this in common with everything else, it was all created by someone.

But who created the something that created everything else? Who is undiminished and unrivaled in their original form, who is with us but unlike us? It's God. In the Hebrew Language, the language the Old Testament was written in, there are all sorts of words that describe creative activity. But in these opening verses, the author uses the word *Barah* for create, and this word is only ever used to describe what God does.

God is the one who creates out of nothing. When the Bible says God created the heavens and the earth, this is a way of saying, God created everything. And if this is true, so what?

God is the only non-contingent, he's the only one who doesn't need anything else. But he possesses everything in a unique way: "He's got the whole world in his hands." If God created everything independently, then we are entirely dependent. God is entirely independent, God has no need of

anything, while all we have is our needs. God can and does whatever God desires, because He is the one who fashioned it.

God was not limited by a lack of good materials. No flaws in the rock, no flaws in the palate, no flaws in the design. Because everything has its origin with God.

Let me try and put it another way...did you ever try and assemble something out of Legos from a random collection, or a bag you got from a thrift shop? It's really frustrating and hard because, most of the time, you're limited by the available pieces. It has never been like this for God. God is not missing any pieces, there is no lack of the right materials, and therefore He cannot do anything less than perfect because he made the pieces himself.

And lastly, God made everything, good. This is the part of the narrative story that I hope you take to heart this morning. No matter what you brought with you, no matter how much you think to yourself, "God must have been missing a few pieces when he made me," the thing I want you to take from this place is that you are a part of God's good creation. You might think, yeah but this bum knee, or this oily skin, or this forgetful brain... hear me: God made everything good. And God don't make no mistakes. And if God created everything that existed, including you and me, and created it good, then the most compelling reason for doing so, the reason these Scriptures will lay out over the next 66 books, is simply this: love. God created everything good, because he loves you.

That's your story today. I hope you believe it. And the simplest way I know how to illustrate it is with a children's book.

### **God Loves Me More Than That**

How much love does God have for me?  
More than the letters between A and Z  
More than the bumbles in a bumble bee.  
God loves me more than that

Tell me please, is God's love high?  
Higher than the moon in a cloudless sky.  
Higher than the space shuttle flying by.  
God loves me higher than that.

Just how deep is God's love for me?  
Deeper than a treasure chest beneath the sea.  
Deeper than a wishing well could ever be.  
God loves me deeper than that.

Tell me please, is the Lord's love wide?  
Wider than a semi truck from side to side.  
Wider than the prairies where the cowboys ride.  
God loves me wider than that!

Just how much does the Lord's love weigh?  
More than elephants munching hay.

More than hippos on a rainy day.  
God love me bigger than that!

Tell me please is the Lord's love loud?  
Louder than the cheering of a football crowd  
Louder than a thunder rumbling storm charged cloud  
God loves me louder than that!

Is God's love soft? Won't you tell me please?  
Softer than a summer breeze  
Much much softer than a kitten's sneeze  
God loves me softer than that!

Lord it's great to be loved by you  
Hope you know that I love you too  
Nice to know that my whole life through  
God loves me more than that!