

Text: Genesis 1:1-2:3

Title: "The Glory of Being Human"

(Second in a series 1n Genesis 1-11, "The Story That Makes Sense of Our Stories")

In the beginning God... In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.... And God said, "Let Us make man, humankind, in Our image, according to Our likeness.... And God created humankind in His own image, in the image of God He created, male and female He created them.

Just before the dawn of this new century, researchers John Naisbitt and Patricia Aburdene wrote a book entitled, *Megatrends 2000*. They were building on their 1983 best-seller *Megatrends*, which many had touted as a "field guide to the future." So as the advent of a new century approached, they put their expertise to work; to articulate the trends they predicted would shape the future. Among the "Millennial Megatrends" as they called them were:

1. The Booming Global Economy
2. A Renaissance of the Arts
3. The Emergence of Free-Market Socialism
4. Global Life-style and Cultural Naturalism
5. The Privatization of the Welfare State
6. The Rise of the Pacific Rim
7. More Women in Leadership
8. The Age of Biology
9. Religious Revival (all over the world)
10. The Triumph of the Individual (pg. 13)

And then Naisbitt and Abundance made this amazing statement: "The most exciting breakthroughs of the 21st century will occur not because of technology but because of an expanding concept of what it means to be human" (pg. 16) They maintained that the most important question for the 21st century would be: "So, what does it mean to be human?"

Which is why we are taking the time this Fall to make our way through the opening chapters of the Bible, to work through Genesis 1-11. As I suggested last Sunday, in Genesis 1-11 we have "The Story That Makes Sense of Our Stories." Every culture in ever age has some kind of story, some kind of meta-narrative, to help make sense of human existence. Every story, every meta-narrative is asking and answering fundamental questions. Like,

What are we?

Who are we?

Where did we come from?

Why are we here?

What is wrong with us? Why do we ache at such deep levels?

Can the problem be fixed?

What happens when we die?

Does human history have meaning? If so, where is it all going?

I suggested last Sunday that our culture – or cultures – are struggling the way they are, because we no longer have any compelling narrative. Oh, there are many being offered. But no single larger story to make sense of our stories.

Which is what makes Genesis 1-11 such a great gift! Here is a story, which when given a chance to make its case, begins to put things into perspective. The story spoke a liberating word to those who first heard it centuries ago. And it speaks a liberating word to those who hear it in our century. We finally begin to understand the glory of being human.

For you see, as we make our way through Genesis 1-11, we begin to discover why Jesus Christ needed to come into our world, and what Jesus Christ came to do. Indeed, as we work through the story, we are led to the feet of Jesus, who turns out to be all we were originally made to be.

“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.... And God said, ‘ Let **us** make man, humankind, in **our** image, according to **our** likeness.’”

Last Sunday, in our first study, I suggested that the main affirmation of Genesis 1 is, in the words of OT scholar Walter Brueggemann, “Creator creates creation.” They are the first three notes of the Song of Creation. Get these three notes correct and we can sing the rest of the song in tune. “Creator creates creation.”

Genesis 1 is riddled with sevens – seven days, seven “Let there be” and seven “it was good.” So in the spirit of the text, I offered seven observations on what the song is singing. And I said that today I would offer an eighth.

A quick review:

First observation: We know “Creator creates creation” because the Creator told us so. What we read in Genesis 1 is not just the product of human reasoning, it is the product of the Divine revelation. No one in the century the text was written, and not one of us in our century, could “come up with” what this text declares on our own.

And what is revealed in the song of creation?

Second observation: Creator creates creation “out of nothing”. In the beginning there was God. And nothing else. And out of that nothing else the Creator created creation. The verb the text uses is *bara*. In the Hebrew Bible only God *baras*. The verb emphasizes creating without analogy, without precedent. The God of Genesis 1 creates “out of nothing.”

Third observation: Creator creates creation by speaking. Simply by speaking. No wrestling with hostile forces, as the ancient myths declared. No exertion of massive energy to overcome resistant powers. Just by speaking. Seven times, “Let there be.”

Fourth observation: Creator creates creation in Divine time, on His own schedule. That I think, is the major point of the 6 + 1 structure of the text. 7 is in the Bible, the Divine number, 7 is the number of completion, perfection. Portraying God creating in seven days is a way of saying, “However God did it, He did it in His time.” Had the divine number been 9, Genesis 1 would

have been created in 8+1 days. Had the Divine number been 12, the text would have been structured around 11+1 days.

Fifth observation: Creator creates creation in a Divine way. As we saw, Genesis 1 is actually structured around a two-fold movement: days 1 to 3, and days 4 to 6. In days 1 to 3 God moves things from formlessness to form. In days 4 to 6, God moves things from the void to fullness. It is the way the living God works in the world, and in our lives: moving from chaos to order, and moving from emptiness to fullness.

Sixth observation: Creator creates creation good. Seven times, “it was good.” Until an eighth time, “it was very good!” Why the shift from “it was good” to it was “very good”? Because **we** were made!! It is when the Creator creates us that His heart sings “very good.”

Which brings us to the seventh observation... where we will linger for a while today: Creator creates a creature in His own image. “Let us make humankind in **our** image, according to **our** likeness... and God *bara*-ed humankind in His likeness, in the image of God He *bara*-ed, male and female He *bara*-ed them.”

Now... Let us step back from the text for a few minutes.... And speak to the larger context in which we have to come to terms with this text. Like you... and every other human being alive today... I do not read Genesis 1 in a vacuum. Like you, I read “Let us make men and women in our image, in the context of multiple, ever conflicting, claims about what it means to be human.

I grew up in the world of science. The formative years of my life – from kindergarten through grade 7 – were lived in Los Alamos, New Mexico, a small city tucked away in the mountain about 50 kilometers northwest of Santa Fe. Los Alamos is the city where the atomic and hydrogen bombs were designed. When my family first moved there it was a “closed city”, everyone had to have a “top-secret” clearance pass to get in and out. All our mail was simply addressed to “P.O. Box 1663, Santa Fe, New Mexico.” My youngest brother is born in Los Alamos, but his birth certificate says “P.O. Box 1663, Santa Fe.”

Los Alamos was, and still is, run by the University of California on behalf of the U.S. National Research laboratories. My father was doing physics for “the lab” as it was called, at first working monthly on the design and tests of nuclear weapons, both fission and fusion, both atomic and hydrogen. He witnessed the explosion of the second hydrogen bomb in the Eniwetok Atoll in the South Pacific. An experience “awe-ful,” as he put it, that he prayed no one would ever witness again. He was part of a team of scientists who target the first bulky computers to think in two dimensions. He himself designed the first computer program to think in three dimensions.

Being the oldest son in a Swedish family meant I was expected to follow in father’s footsteps. So I too took up physics and mathematics, earning my undergraduate degree in both at the University of California, San Diego, which was designed to be “the premier” physics institute in the world. I had lectures in theoretical physics, from professors like Edward Teller, father of the hydrogen bomb. I had lectures in microbiology with professors like Jonas Selk, inventor of the

polio vaccine bearing his name. I took “Philosophy of Science” from Thomas Kuhn, who wrote the influential book, “The Structure of Scientific Revolution.”

During my third year in university, I began to wrestle with a call to the preaching ministry. As I have shared with you before, on April 4, 1968 – the night Martin Luther King was murdered – I gave into the call. The next week I ventured out to tell my professor of thermo-dynamics (the study of heat and energy transfer) that I was thinking of leaving physics to go to seminary to prepare to preach Jesus and His Gospel. He was shocked and disappointed. And asked me, “Why would you throw away your brains and a promising future to preach Jesus?”

The person who helped me the most to integrate what I was reading in the Bible and what I was learning in university... especially when it came to the equation of what it means to be human, is Dr. Richard Bube, who, when I first met him, was Professor of Material Sciences and Electrical Engineering at Stanford University. In his field he is known for books like, “Electrons in Solids,” “Photoelectronic Properties of Semiconductors” and other bed time reading!!

In 1971 Dr. Bube wrote a book entitled, “The Human Quest.” It is a book that can justify the label “classic.”

Richard Bube’s central thesis is that reality – and human beings within reality – has to be studied and understood on many different levels from many different angles. He puts the thesis this way: “There are many levels at which a given situation can be described. An exhaustive description on one level does not preclude meaningful descriptions on other levels.”

Dr. Bube takes as an example, the sentence “I love you.” “I love you” can be described on many different levels.

The numerical level, for instance. 8 letters, i, l, o, v, e, y, o, u, two are repeated – o, o. The letters are the 5th, 9th, 12th, 15th, 21st, and 25th of the English alphabet, arranged in this order: 9, 12-15-22-5, 25-15-21. This is a true and exhaustive description of the sentence on one level.

But there is also the phonetic level, the level of sound. We have in the sentence a long-i, a short-o, the liquid consonant-l, the voiced fricative v, the silent e, the palatal semi-vowel y, and the diphthong ou. This too is a true and exhaustive description of the sentence – on one level.

But there is also the vocabulary level, the level of words. The letters and sounds interact to form words. And the words point to realities beyond themselves.

And there is the grammatical level. There is a subject – I, a verb – love, an object – you. The verb is in the present tense. This too is a true and exhaustive description of the sentence – one level.

And on it goes... to other levels. Finally to the performative level; the letters, sounds, words, grammar, making something happen. “I love you.” Moving the heart of the person to whom the sentence is spoken.

The thesis again: “There are many levels in which a given situation can be described. An exhaustive description on one level does not preclude descriptions on another level.”

Indeed, a complete description of any given situation requires description on every level!

Reality – the universe, and we human beings with it – has to be studied and understood on many different levels. These levels include: theology, sociology, psychology, anthropology, zoology, botany, biology, chemistry, physics, origins. We do not finally understand the world... We do not finally understand ourselves... until we take into consideration descriptions of reality from all these levels.

Physicists are right: we are complex packets of mysterious interacting energy forces. But that is not all we are.

Chemists are right: atomic and subatomic particles and waves interact to form molecules and nonliving matter. We are complex chemical machines. John Stackhouse called me the other day and greeted me with, “You old bag of dirt.” “Dust to dust, ashes to ashes.” Molecules to molecules, atom to atom. But that is not all we are!

Biologists are right: chemicals interact and combine to form more complex forms of life. We are complex cellular computers. But that is not all we are!

Botanists and zoologists can describe us and our world still further. And the anthropologists and the psychologists can tell us even more about us. And the sociologists can add even more insight. And the theologians then relate it all to ultimate reality, to the Maker, Upholder, and Redeemer of the whole scheme of creation.

Again, a complete description of reality on one level does not preclude a complete description on another level. A complete biological description of the human being, for instance, does not do away with the need for a theological description of the human being. And a complete theological description does not do away with the need for a biological description of the human being.

The problem emerges when one level things it knows the whole, when it ignores the insights of the other levels.

So.... back to the Genesis text.

“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth... and God said, ‘Let **us** make humankind in **our** image, according to **our** likeness.’”

Up to this point in Genesis 1, we have heard the Creator say, “Let there be.” “Let there be light.” “Let there be a firmament.” “Let the earth sprout vegetation.” But when it comes to the creation of human beings, the wording changes; God gets more personally involved. “Let us.” “Let us make humankind.” “Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness.”

It is this level of understanding that our culture, or cultures, are dying to know. The universe is not an accident. You are not an accident. Indeed, you are so much more than you know; you are a creature created in the image and likeness of the Creator!

Whole books have been written in the text! And rightfully so.

“In our image, according to our likeness.” There does not appear to be any significant distinction between the terms “image” and “likeness.” In the rest of Scripture they are used interchangeably; in one place image, in another likeness.

As I read the text, two main facts about being human are being declared. Representation and reflection. Human beings are created to represent the Creator in the world, and to reflect the nature and character of the Creator in the world.

Represent: In the ancient near east, when Kings and emperors overcame new territories, they would set up an image, or likeness, of themselves to signify this sovereignty over the land and its people. Some kings and emperors still do this! The image, or likeness, usually in the form of a statue, was the Emperor’s way of representing himself; it was a visible way to declare an ordinarily invisible fact.

The image somehow reported the presence of the one emperor (Waltke, 65). Indeed, the image somehow functioned “as ruler in place” of the emperor. (Waltke, 66).

Do you see what Genesis 1 is revealing about us? Something we would have never deduced on our own. God has made us to be His representatives in His creation; a kind of visible expression of an invisible reality.

Are we then surprised that God says to us, “...fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over...” (1:28)? As Ian Hart puts it: “The text is saying that exercising royal dominion over the earth as God’s representative is the basic purpose for which God created” men and women. (Genesis 1:1-2:3, Tynbul 46 (1995), 322). On the Creator’s behalf we look after the creation! What dignity!

“On the Creator’s behalf.” As *His* representatives. To care for the earth as the creator cares. *That* is the king. To have dominion, to exercise care over in the same way the Creator does. Psalm 145:9: “The Lord is good to all; he has compassion on all He has made.” Compassion... good to all. *That* is the spirit in which we are to exercise our human dignity in the created order. Compassion over all He has made.

Sadly something has gone wrong with the Creator’s image... and we will understand from Genesis 3. The creature created to care as the Creator cares does not now practice this. Towards the end of his life, my dad lamented his role in the designing of nuclear weapons. We were created to represent the Creator’s concern in the created order. It is part of the glory of being human.

And reflect: As the image and likeness of the Creator, we were created to reflect the Creator's nature and character. Imagine that! The rest of creation is to look at the human species and see the nature and character of God!

In Genesis 5:3, we read that Adam became a father again (after losing Abel and Cain). And the text says, "he became the father of a son in his own likeness, according to his image." Adam's son Seth somehow reflects the nature and character of Adam and Eve. And somehow we reflect the nature and character of God to one another and to the rest of creation. At one level we are of copy of our Maker (John Piper).

What do we reflect? Obviously, there is no way we can reflect everything about God's nature and character! We are, after all, finite creatures, there is no way we can fully reflect the nature and character of the infinite Creator. We are not, and never will be, all-knowing, all-powerful, ever-present. Though some of us try to be!!

So what about God do we reflect?

The capacity to create. Need I illustrate?

The capacity to conceptualize. In Genesis 2 Adam names the animals, reflecting the ability to sort out the diversity of creation and put things into categories.

We reflect God's capacity to communicate. We are the creatures who can verbalize, giving reality in words. No small miracle!

We have, like God, the capacity to discern, to make moral judgments. Through, as we all painfully know, that capacity has been damaged, in some cases severely so.

We reflect God's capacity to care. Of all the creatures on earth, we, like God, can put ourselves in others' shoes and feel what they feel.

But take careful note of the wording in the Genesis text. "Let **us**." "In **our** image." "According to **our** likeness." It would seem that the major thing about God we were created to reflect is the "us-ness" of God.

From the beginning of the story we meet a God who can use plural pronoun. Indeed, the word for God in Greek is a plural noun. *Elohim* – plural. But always used with a **singular** verb. The God who creates us is the God who speaks of Himself as "Us". Yes, the "us" could be the so-called "regal we." Like the Queen who will say "we" when she really means "I." Yes, the "us" could refer to the so-called heavenly court, to the angelic hosts that surround the Creator (Job 1, Isaiah 6, 1 Kings 22). But nowhere in the rest of the Bible is it said we are created in the image and likeness of angels.

God's use of "Us" and "Our" points to the mystery; that within the One God there is somehow a plurality. The Living God is not a solitary monad. The Living God is a community.

It was the Swiss theologian Karl Barth who famously emphasized this in the last century. "In God's own being," wrote Barth, "there exists a divine and therefore self-grounded prototype to which this being is compared." "In God's own being and sphere there is a counterpart: a genuine but harmonious self-encounter and self-discovery; a free co-existence and co-operation; an open confrontation and reciprocity." (Church Dogmatics III, Book 1, 183-185).

The Living God is Being-in-fellowship. There is an I-Thou interchange within the One God. “Us.” “Our.” “We.” The Genesis text is not overtly speaking of the Trinity... but it is opening the door to what would later be understood as the Trinity.

And the point of the Genesis text is... that we have been created to reflect the relational nature of the Creator. We have been created to reflect the I-Thou relationship of the One God.

To put it more simply, humanity in the image of the Creator is humanity-in-relationship. God is relationship and we have been created to reflect that relationship-ness. Simon Garfunkel – now I am really dating myself! – used to sing a song with the refrain, “I am a rock, I am an island.” That is not humanity in the image of God. It is in-humanity. We were made for relationship. Which is why broken relationships hurt more than broken bones.

“Let us make humankind.” We were made to reflect the Us-ness of the Creator. We were made for relationship.

We were made for relationship with the God who is Relationship. We were made by the Relationship – “Us” – for the Relationship -- “Us”. We were made to enjoy relationship with the Relationship!

Indeed, as the story will further unfold, we were made to share in the Relationship. Get this: We were made to enter into and live with “Us-ness” of God. We were made *by* the Relationship, *for* the Relationship, to live *in* the Relationship!

Which means we finally know who we are when we know the Relationship. We finally know what it means to be human when we know the One who made us in His image.

Which brings us to the promised eighth observation. I said I had an eighth observation or what the creator reveals in Genesis 1.

Eight observation: Creator creates us as sabbatical creatures. Another truth we would have *never* deduced on our own. The apex of creation is not we humans. The apex is the *Sabbath*. God has built into the very fabric of the created order a special day. The seventh day.

Have you ever noticed that in the song of creation the seventh day does not end? It was evening and morning, day one. It was evening and morning, day two. It was evening and morning, day three. It was evening and morning, day four. It was evening and morning, day five. It was evening and morning, day six. But *no* “It was evening and morning, day seven.” Day seven does not end!! Day seven is the reason the Creator creates!! To enjoy what the Creator has made. To enjoy the Creator.

You see, in Genesis 1, although we watch God in boundless energy and creativity, calling forth light and stars and fruit trees and sea monsters, there is more to God than what is revealed in all that work.

This is how Ronald Wallace expresses it: “That ‘the Lord rested the seventh day.’ means that He has not allowed the creativity of the days of creation to exhaust him or burden him, and his limited creation purposely. He has something to say that could not be said in the work of the six days, something to give that is not yet given through all the extensions and wealth He has put into the world in creating it. ... God has something new and something extra to give this world over and above what He has already given it in its creation.” (The Ten Commandments, 65-66). Wow!! And... on the Sabbath day, God gives us that which He does not give in all the creativity of creating creation!!

Wallace has God say: “I will put a Sabbath day at the heart of the order of things in this universe, and I will bless this Sabbath day weekly as it comes round, and on this day I will communicate to man My own Sabbath rest. On this day I will truly share with him that in Myself which I have kept back so far from Creation. ... Listen to Me as I draw near to speak, and respond to Me as I draw near to offer you my fellowship and seek this day to draw you to Myself.

For we were created *by* the Relationship, *for* the Relationship, to live *in* the Relationship.

In the beginning God created... us. And God said, “Let us make humankind in our image!”

Which is what Jesus Christ comes into the world to make happen. He *is* the image and likeness of God in every way! And He says to us, “Come to me, all who are weary and have overburdened yourselves, and I will rest you. I will bring you back *into* that for which *we* made you.

Let us pray... Be still... that is the One who made you saying to you right now: “Joyful, Joyful.”