

John Sampson
"The First Creation"
Text: Genesis 1:1 - 5
Preached at KVCC
July 16, 2017

Will you pray with me?

God, may the words of my mouth and the meditations of all of our hearts be acceptable to you, our rock, and our redeemer. AMEN.

What is God's dream for her creation?

It's a fundamental question. It's a question that gets to the purpose of not only the universe, but of our lives as humans. For if we ask what God desires for creation we also ask what God wishes for us.

What does God desire for humanity? What is her vision for her children?

The answer, or I should say, the answers to these questions are scattered across the pages of the sacred stories that make up our Bible. The answers are also strewn across our lives, and the lives of people throughout time. The answers are found in the lives of Eve, and Abraham, of Mary and of Jesus. But the answers are also found sitting in this room this morning, in the ordinariness of our lives.

There are many answers to the question of God's vision for our lives, but I wondered if there was a story or a symbol that summed up what that dream could be. I wondered if there could be an image in our tradition, or in our experiences of the world, that could capture God's original hope for our lives.

And I think I found it.

I think I found a symbol that could hold the hope and blessing implicit in our human experience. I think I found a symbol that

could hold the vastness of God's love for her creation and for her children. I think I found a symbol in an ordinary and yet extraordinary place. I think I found such a symbol in God's very first creation. I think I found a symbol of God's purpose for the world in the symbol of light.

Light which streams in through these windows and illuminates our days and nights. Light which helps us to see our world and comprehend its workings and meaning. Light which has no substance, and yet is real and manifest.

It is this light that is the cornerstone to all of the rest of God's creation, and the underlying logic to how she will engage with her children for all time. It is her definitive statement of her purpose, and the meaning of the Divine work.

And yet this primeval light is a mystery. It is a light unlike any light we have experienced because it has no source. The sun and the moon and the stars aren't created until later. This first light is a supernatural light, a disembodied light. It suffuses all of creation, and is unbounded in its reach. And it is the expression of God's purpose in all of her creative acts.

The key to appreciating the richness of God's vision of blessing implicit in the making of the universe is understanding what light meant to the authors and cultures that gave rise to the stories of our Bible. So let us hear from those authors. Let us hear in their own words what light meant to them.

Let us hear a reading from the prophet Isaiah.

The sun shall no longer be
your light by day,
nor for brightness shall the moon
give light to you by night;
but the Lord will be your everlasting light,
and your God will be your glory.

God will be your light. The prophet brings us back to the stories of creation and reveals to us the mystery of that first light which had no source. That supernal light is nothing less than the presence of God. In the very first act of creation God promises us that she will be with us through everything to come. There will be nothing that can ultimately separate us from God. No doubt, no alienation, no evil, nothing. God's unbounded presence infuses the heavens and the earth. We may believe we live in a purely material world, but the authors of Genesis, and the prophet Isaiah, point to another reality. They show us that we also live in a sacred universe. It is sacred because our being exists within the radiance of the Holy One.

Let us hear a reading from the book of Job.

He has redeemed my soul from going down to the Pit,
and my life shall see the light.
God indeed does all these things,
twice, three times, with mortals,
to bring back their souls from the Pit,
so that they may see the light of life.

The light of life. When we are alive it is said that there is a light that shines within our eyes. Our God is a God of life. The process of creation is God's statement about the ultimate value of life – human and non-human. In the days of creation that will follow God creates all life and imbues it with the power of reproduction and fertility until the skies, and the land, and the seas are swarming with all types of creatures. And in the final act of creation God molds humanity and breathes within us the Divine breath. We are made not simply to live, but to live saturated with God's spirit. This life is a rejection of the power of the grave, of the gravity that brings us down into the Pit. It is a rejection of all of the forces of chaos, which negate life and corrode its unbounded drive to express its richness and diversity.

Let us hear a reading from the Psalmist.

The Lord loves those who hate evil;
he guards the lives of his faithful;
he rescues them from the hand of the wicked.
Light dawns for the righteous,

and joy for the upright in heart.
Rejoice in the Lord, O you righteous,
and give thanks to his holy name!

Light dawns for the righteous. To resist the forces of darkness, the gravity of death and the rejection of life give rise to an ethic, an ethic of light. This ethic is founded on praising God for her blessing of life lived in the presence of the Holy One. It is an ethic based on adopting God's dream as one's own vision of the purpose of creation. To look into the light of God's first creation is to be asked to make a decision. Do we support life? Do we wish to live within God's presence and by her teaching? It is perhaps easy to respond to these questions with an eager 'Yes!' But we know that to live into these questions is decidedly more difficult. Isn't God's path the hardest road to travel?

Let us hear again from the prophet Isaiah.

The people who walked in darkness
have seen a great light;
those who lived in a land of deep darkness—
on them light has shined.

We have lived in darkness, but now we see a great light. We are redeemed, not just as individuals, but as the human race. The light of redemption is a product of the light of God's unbounded and unbreakable presence in our lives. It speaks to the truth that we will fall away from the light of life, that we will not always choose the luminous ethic. But God will remain, and God will hold out the path to reconciliation. Fragmentation and fracture may be a chapter in our story, but they will not be the last word.

Divine presence, life, righteousness and redemption – these are the meanings of the light that was God's first creation. They are the attributes that structure the universe, and our lives. These are attributes of blessing and a reflection of God's unbounded love, of her desire for relationship and communion with her works.

But all of these reflections are perhaps simply an abstraction. As people who live in a manifest world where might we be able to look at God's light directly, to see the light embodied, to experience the light not in a metaphysical realm, but in a world that bleeds and struggles?

Hear our final reading from the good news of John.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

The light of life, the victorious light that banishes the darkness. This light was born among us in the person of Jesus, our brother and our teacher. Jesus who was so bathed in the light of God's presence that some of us believe he was God himself. Jesus who told us that he came to give us life, and give it abundantly. Jesus who taught us the

meaning of the ethic of light when he told us a parable where the righteous person was an unclean foreigner who helped a man in need, and not the religious leaders who prized their ritual purity over the well being of their neighbor. Jesus who illuminated to the powerful and the privileged what redemption meant when he ate with prostitutes, and the poor, the illiterate, and the dirty.

But the capacity to become a human lamp that holds and shines the light of God out into a world suffering in darkness is not limited to Jesus. It is the potentiality that is present in all of humanity. When we read the stories of Jesus, when we reflect on the meaning of his life, and his death, when we enact his ethic within our own lives, we have the ability to become the children of light.

Ask yourself if your work, and your relationships, and your highest hopes are filled with light.

Do they create and strengthen your relationship with God? Is God present in the experience of your life? Does your activity promote life in abundance? Does it support the fullness of life in others? Are you working for the redemption of the broken and the fragmented wherever you find it? Do you follow the ethic of light and work for communion among all people? Do you shine your light to overcome the chaotic darkness that threatens our world?

These are all questions of discipleship, because to the extent that we follow Jesus and his message in our lives we become the human lamps of God's light.

At the end of the six days of active creation the authors of Genesis tell us that God sees that all of her work is good, and then she rests. It's an amazing image. God the omnipotent, the being who wills everything into existence is tired. She needs to take a break. Creation is hard work. To create light, the radiant logic that

undergirds the rest of the universe, is hard work. Creating and sustaining life is hard work. Giving birth to humanity and imbuing it with the Divine spirit is hard work.

It is hard work for God, and it is hard work for us. God's dream for humanity is that we become the children of light, that we make a commitment to walk the difficult path of creation not just for a day, or a week. God is asking us to walk in the footsteps of Jesus and his message of love and compassion for our entire lives. And she knows that she is asking everything of us.

How will we respond? That is the question. That is always the question.

AMEN.