

Let there be... being becomes creator

This following text is Jonathan Green's speaking notes from the gathering held at The Sanctuary Westminster on 19th October 2006.

Recap:

Last time we met, we thought about how there was a 'before the beginning.' A period when time and space did not exist as the canvas for galaxies and matter. We thought about how difficult it is for us to imagine 'nothing' – a time before creation – because as we try and conceive of 'nothing', that 'nothing' becomes a 'something' and then we are no longer thinking about 'nothing' because 'nothing' *is* a 'something'... I think that the last session was all about gaining some kind of grand perspective, realizing that our 3lb brains are inadequate to deal with such huge questions and that our language is always being stretched to its limits when we try to describe God and how we often resort to poetry and song and then silence... In essence, we considered how having a healthy respect for God is a starting point for a life well lived – a life with perspective.

We thought about how when we subtract the cosmos there is nothing left, except for "one small detail: God, a being, a life, a mind, a heart, an intelligence, a creative personality, an essential goodness, an inexpressible beauty, a light beyond all seeing, an infinite song that by its very being gives meaning to meaning, gives glory to glory, gives life to life, a pure consciousness - pure in every sense of the word."¹

Now, we do not know what God was doing before creation... we can only imagine... however at some point *being* became *creator*. In other words God creates an outside. The ideas, thoughts, imagining... well they go beyond just an idea. The dream becomes a reality.

Being decided to create beings... but it isn't that easy... I know it sounds strange to say it this way, and some of you may have never heard this articulated or even considered, but it is "not easy being Being and deciding to create other beings. It's not easy if you want them to really exist, again, not just as ideas in your imagination... but as real beings in... in a place outside your imagination. And so that's God's first challenge, to create an outside – because up to now in our story, there is no outside, there is only God. So God must begin by creating a not-God, an outside, a place for beings to exist."²

... And when I say 'beings,' I mean 'things that be'... things that exist, like hydrogen atoms and quarks and gravity and light... I'm talking about viruses and rotifers and blue-green algae and yellow pond lilies. I'm talking about wood ducks and platypuses and parrotfish—and Galapagos tortoises...

So God creates a canvas - a creative medium: 'the matrix of space and time so that beings can be, so that the beings imagined by the Being can be expressed in an *outside*, in a *somewhere* ... in a place and time.

And unlike other creation narratives from the ancient near east where creation comes from preexisting matter. For the Jews, there is a very different conviction that matter comes not out of some preexisting stuff, on one hand, and not, strictly speaking, from nothing, on the other hand, but rather, that all matter comes from meaning... That matter comes from an idea in the mind of God, an idea that is expressed in the meaning-making words, *Let there BE...?*³

Introduced to the artist...

Reading the first chapter of Genesis is rather like what might happen to you at a really great art

¹ Brian McLaren, *The Story We Find Ourselves In*, 28

² Brian McLaren, *The Story We Find Ourselves In*, 30

³ Brian McLaren, *The Story We Find Ourselves In*, 30

exhibition. Suppose you are sitting quietly, overwhelmed by the beauty and power of the magnificent paintings. Then someone approaches you and says, ‘How would you like to meet the artist?’ Who could resist such an invitation! Genesis 1 is an introduction to the artist.⁴ To the maker of heaven and earth.

And what an extravagant artist! What wild creativity! Eugene Peterson says; ‘The Creator goes off on one wild, specific tangent after another, or millions simultaneously, with an exuberance that would seem to be unwarranted, and with an energy sprung from an unfathomable font. What is going on here... that it all flows so freely wild, like the creek, that it all surges in such a free, fringed tangle? Freedom is the world’s water and weather, the world’s nourishment freely given, its soil and sap: and the creator loves pizzazz.’⁵ I love that... God loves pizzazz!!!

Genesis 1 is all about God establishing his kingdom, a space and time where God rules and reigns. Where his way of doing things is expressed in creation and then through and by his subjects. As King, however, God does not hold himself distant from his creation. He is not the sort of monarch who rules from afar and takes no interest in his territories or his subjects. Having built his kingdom, God reigns over it in a deeply personal way.

And God goes even further, as he creates humankind, he blesses them and speaks to them directly: ‘be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it’ (Genesis 1:28).

This is often called the cultural mandate – it charges us to bring every type of cultural activity within the service of God... God himself is revealed or ‘imaged’ in his creation precisely as we are busy within the creation, developing its hidden potentials in agriculture, art, music, commerce, politics, scholarship, family life, church, leisure and so on, in ways that honour God. As we take God’s creative commands of ‘Let there be...’ and develop the potentials in them, we continue to spread the fragrance of his presence throughout the world he has made.

In the opening words of Act 1 we have considered the divine act of creation.

Considering creation in this way should leave us awestruck and we respond like the heavenly host and worshipping multitudes seen in Revelation 4 with a song of worship:

*You are worthy, our Lord and God,
To receive glory and honour and power,
For you created all things,
And by your will they were created
And have their being. Rev 4:11*

Heaven and earth agree - God is worthy of our worship because he is creator. We have thought about how creating creation was difficult but rewarding work. God said that his creation was very good and then rested. Then hear God’s invitation and command given to us all– be creative. Develop, adapt, create - engage in creative ongoing activity. Oh, and don’t forget to rest from time to time.

John Calvin said. The world around us is a ‘theatre of God’s glory.’ And we know that God’s glory is his style and way of doing things. We therefore display God’s glory as we live in his way. We know what this style is like by becoming familiar with the creation narrative! That is why Act 1 is so important. To live life to its fullest we need to know what is *normal*! We need to find our place in the Story of God - our place within creation. That is why having a good grasp of the beginning is crucial for living lives to the glory of God.

⁴ Bartholemew and Goheen, *The Drama of Scripture*, 11

⁵ Eugene Peterson, *The Contemplative Pastor*, 71

The Sanctuary is a creation – and you know, it is difficult to make something in your imagination become real! We can imagine so many great things, but you will agree that it is hard work to realize them. I can imagine a great essay, but you know how hard it is to craft that imagined work. It is hard work to make things happen – it requires effort, you can imagine how creating a universe as vast and complex as ours would require great effort. To think that it was easy work for God would diminish the value of creation as a creative act.

We want to create a new Little Sanctuary – but it is not that easy. We want to create a stunning worship environment. We want to expand our social work. And it requires hard work and the work of many hands. But I invite you all to join together in creative work. God has done so much in this first year, who knows what might happen in the coming years - what will all this look like when we put 10 candles on the cake? We will find out in time. Let us join with God and create something wonderful.