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## Eastminster Worship Services

Sunday, August 16, 2009

### Never the Same: When the Word Changes You

#### *Meet the Author*

Genesis 1 – 2

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Philip Yancey writes, “If God exists, and our planet represents God’s work of art, we will never grasp why we are here without taking that reality into account.”<sup>1</sup> Creationism? The “Big Bang?” Intelligent Design? All are theories about the origin of life. Each articulates a theory of authorship.

I personally find the biblical account of creation most satisfying and compelling. In it, God calls the worlds into being. God has formed the world to be his world. I have spent many years studying the scientific method and its postulated theory of the “Big Bang.” Of late the merging of thought between science and theology espouses the theory of Intelligent Design that a supernatural being got things started and evolution continues the process. Theories remain theories until an existential crisis descends on us. Theories demand conclusions. Conclusions inform one’s worldview. A worldview informs behavior. Your conclusion about who or what is the author of life will establish the bedrock of your worldview. Why? Your answer is about an author.

Genesis is a reflection upon and witness to God calling the worlds into being. God’s call announces the special character of God as the one who calls. It announces a special vocation for creation and for a people as the ones called and the ones who must answer. The call of God announces that the peculiar connection between God and world is that of call and answering. The author calls and we are to answer.

Never the Same: When the Word Changes You. “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.” God is the subject of the first verse of the Bible. In chapter one alone, the word God is used 35 times. The Word of God asserts that God is the author of life. This premise of God’s

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<sup>1</sup>Philip Yancey, *Rumors* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2003), 29.

authorship is rooted not only in the grammatical-historical context of the Bible, but it is also imbedded in one's affirmation of what the Bible is. From the historic, orthodox and apostolic Christian tradition, the Bible is the inspired and authoritative rule of God for faith and practice. Whether or not you affirm this about the Bible, you still must come to terms with the notion of creation. Be this chapter myth or fact, you must come to terms with the message of the chapter. Did God create out of the formless, form? Or is God the initiator of an evolutionary process which moves the formless into form? Or did atoms collide creating form out of the formless?

Never the Same: When the Word Changes You. The Word of God reads, "In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth..." In no uncertain terms, the writer of Genesis establishes God as the creator. God calls a world into existence and the substance of the call is the promise. The first words in scripture depict God as creator. Life as we know it had its beginning with God. Of all the things we know about God, the first attribute of God that is mentioned in the scriptures is that God created.

Genesis chapters one and two describe the creation of the world. All facets of creation are described from solar systems to inhabitants. God created everything from nothing. *The Second Helvetic Confession* states this about God as creator. "God is one. We believe and teach that God is all sufficient in himself, invisible, incorporeal, immense, eternal, Creator of all things both visible and invisible, the greatest good, living, quickening and preserving all things, omnipotent and supremely wise, kind and merciful, just and true."<sup>2</sup>

According to the Bible, God envisioned a world order, a human race and a destiny for history. God has a purpose and a will for creation. The creation, which exists only because of and for the sake of the creator's purpose, has freedom to respond to the creator in various ways. Genesis 1:3-26 depict God bringing form to formlessness for everything, but man. The creation order is most profound. God spoke creation into being in six days. Never the Same: When the Word Changes You.

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<sup>2</sup>*The Book of Confessions*, 5.015.



Have any of you seen the remarkable exhibition known as Body Worlds? On display are approximately sixty bodies which have been preserved through the process known as *plastination*. *Plastination* replaces individual cells of the human body with brightly colored resins and epoxies. This process preserves the body, whole or stripped away to reveal its inner parts. The cadavers are placed in lifelike poses.

Janet and I have visited the exhibit two times. We saw plastinates posed as a runner, a javelin thrower, a chess player and a basketball player. We saw one plastinate that was preserved to clearly display the intricate and complex vascular system of the human body. We viewed a shrunken liver caused by alcohol abuse and lungs black from cigarette smoke. Plastinates are eerily fascinating. They are cadavers, most certainly. Persons before death voluntarily sign over their bodies for this purpose. Plastinates are no longer living beings. But we are. “The LORD God formed the man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being.”<sup>3</sup>

At graveside services, we hear the familiar words, “Unto the mercy of Almighty God, we commend the soul of our *brother* departed and we commit *his* body to the ground, earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust, in the sure and certain hope of the resurrection to eternal life; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen”<sup>4</sup> According to Genesis 2:7, God formed man from the dust of the ground and breathed life into him making man a living being. As man, male and female, at our last breath, we return to the ground. From dust we began and to dust we return. In between, it is the breath of God that makes you and me a living being. Never the Same: When the Word Changes You.

In Genesis chapter 2, we note that God placed man in the garden he had made. In the garden were trees and rivers. The garden was vast. Man was placed in the garden to work it and care for it. While in the garden, God brought all of the creatures he had made. And he asked man to name them. Man named

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<sup>3</sup>Genesis 2:7.

the animals. Following that process, God determined that man should not be alone. No suitable helper was found from the animals. So God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep and removed one of his ribs from which he fashioned woman. The man proclaimed that woman was bone of his bones and flesh of his flesh. As a living being, man needed a partner.

God breathed life into you. He spoke you into existence. God stated your name and called you blessed. God is the author of life. God has spoken your identity to you. You are uniquely suited for his purposes. Romans 1:16-17 and Matthew 28:1-10 confirm this. The gospel is the power of God for salvation and the resurrection of Jesus from the dead defeats death. The words gospel and resurrection call a people to a promise. Jesus is the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through him. There is nothing to fear, because the tomb is empty. Jesus defeated death.

How can you believe that God is the author of your life? May I suggest the following? First, believe that God is personally interested in you. Your life matters to Him. Second, believe that God knows the number of days you will live. He has purposed great things for you. Third, believe that God spoke your life into existence. You are a living being.

Tony Campolo tells this story:

Many years ago, when I was a young pastor, I was asked to be a counselor at a junior-high camp. Everyone should be a counselor at a junior-high camp-ONCE! For any Roman Catholics who may be reading this, I have to say that I now believe there is a purgatory. I have been there. It's junior-high camp! Junior-high boys have a strange and often cruel sense of humor. There is a strong tendency for them to pick on some unfortunate, offbeat kid and ridicule him, making him the brunt of their jokes. This was certainly the case during this particular week of summer camp. They picked on a thirteen-year-old kid named Billy, who couldn't walk right or talk right. He dragged his body across the campground in spastic fashion, and when he spoke his words were markedly slurred. The boys at the camp would often mimic his gestures, and they thought that was funny. One day I heard him asking for directions. I can even now hear his almost indiscernible, painfully spoken words: "Which...way...is...the craft shop?" The boy he asked, mocking his slurred speech and using convoluted hand language said, "Its over-there...Billy boy." But the cruelest thing they did was on a Thursday morning. Billy's cabin had been assigned to lead morning devotions, and his cabin mates all voted him to be the speaker. They wanted to get him up there in front of everybody so they could be entertained by his struggling attempts to say anything at all. It did not seem to bother Billy. Somehow he dragged himself up to the rostrum as waves of snickers flowed over the audience. It took Billy almost half a minute to say,

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<sup>4</sup>*The Book of Common Worship* (Philadelphia: Pennsylvania: The Board of Christian Education of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America, 1946), 213-214.

“Je-sus...loves...me... and...I...love Je-sus.” When he finished there was stunned silence. When I looked over my shoulder I saw that all over the place there were junior-high boys with tears streaming down their cheeks. Some of them had their heads bowed. A revival broke out!”<sup>5</sup>

Never the Same: When the Word Changes You. As a man, male or female, you are made in the image of God. God made you. He breathed life into you. He continues to breathe life into you and waken you each day. Do you know this truth? If you are an unbeliever, but you like what you are hearing, then the Holy Spirit has regenerated you and given you the ability this day to accept Jesus Christ as your personal Savior and Lord. If you understand what I am talking about, please repeat this prayer after me:

“O God, I am a sinner. I am sorry for my sin. I am willing to turn from my sin. I receive Jesus as my Savior; I confess Him as my Lord. From now on I want to follow Him in the fellowship of His Church. In Jesus’ name. Amen.”

Man is fearfully and wonderfully made. God made man in his image. Your life matters. God spoke you into existence. God blesses you and gives you abundant life.<sup>6</sup> God provides for you.<sup>7</sup> God calls you to meaningful work.<sup>8</sup> God has spoken your identity to you. You are uniquely suited for his purposes.

Never the Same: When the Word Changes You. “Then God said, ‘Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule.’” Meet the author. You possess God’s life and standards. Let us pray!

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<sup>5</sup>Tony Campolo, *Let Me Tell You a Story* (Nashville, Tennessee: W Publishing Group, 2000), 111-112.

<sup>6</sup>Genesis 1:28

<sup>7</sup>Genesis 1:29

<sup>8</sup>Genesis 2:15