

Pastor Jamie's Sermon

Good Shepherd Church, September 17, 2023

"Moravian Essentials: God the Father as Creator"

"Young at Heart" Message

Last week, I said I was going to try something new for a few weeks and see how you like it. I'm tentatively calling it the "Young at Heart" message. My hope is that this will be a message that will apply to both kids and adults alike, so that in the event there are kids here, they can feel included in the service. And if there aren't, the adults get a fun message too.

Today, we're talking about God the Father as Creator, the first of our six Moravian essentials. From the beginning, God has entrusted humankind with responsibility to care for creation. God partners with humanity to provide ongoing care for creation. Sometimes, we misunderstand our role in caring for God's creation, or we expect perfection when perfection can take many forms.

To illustrate this, I want to share a short video clip from a recent Disney movie. Has anyone here seen Encanto? Encanto is a fascinating movie about family systems, individual gifts, and has some deeper symbols of creation. It would be a fun family movie night movie to watch and discuss! But, for now, the clip I'm going to show is a song between the main character, Mirabel, and her sister Isabella.

Mirabel and Isabella have not gotten along very well. Each member of this family received special gifts that help their Encanto thrive. But, they are also only known for the gifts they were given, and Mirabel didn't receive a special gift. Isabella, on the other hand, received the ability to create. Specifically, she is expected to create things that are perfect, and she is expected to act perfectly in all situations.

Mirabel reads this perfection as pretentiousness, but she discovers in this scene that Isabella is actually quite unhappy having to put on this front of constant perfection. And, we discover in this scene that things that are imperfect by human standards can still be beautiful, and all things are beautifully made. Let's watch the clip, and as we do, try to think about how this might apply to God's creation.

(Video)

So, what do you think? Anyone have any thoughts they'd like to share from this clip?

What I see happening in this clip is the realization that even things we might consider “imperfect” are beautifully made. Isabella was given this “gift” of perfection, but that “gift” didn’t allow her to thrive or live fully into her own being.

Often, society puts pressures on us to be perfect. But God didn’t create us to attain human standards of perfection. God created us to live perfectly into the gifts we were given, the personality traits that make us who we are, and to care for the gifts of other people and living things. God does not expect perfection from us. As Isabella says, “what could I do if I just knew it didn’t need to be perfect, it just needed to be?”

The Message

As I said earlier, today we’re talking about God as Creator. Because of God’s gift of creation, and because we have been created in the image of God, humans become God’s stewards for the care of God’s world.

God’s care for creation and humanity continues when people:

- Love God
- Love their neighbour
- Do justice
- Love mercy
- Walk humbly with God
- Practice sabbath living
- Practice ethical stewardship of resources
- Practice God’s Shalom, or peace

God has given us the gift of creation, not only of humankind, but of all of the natural world. There are some elements of the environment that are amazing, inspiring, and beyond comprehension. When I visited the Grand Canyon, for example, words could not describe the magnitude of that natural phenomenon. It was breathtaking, and if that isn’t an example of God’s love for us and for the world, I don’t know what is.

Likewise, I have had the opportunity to enjoy the outdoors and do some hiking since I’ve been here in Calgary. The photos you’re seeing on the slides today are all photos I’ve taken recently on hikes. One of my own spiritual practices is to spend time in nature when I can. I can tell when I need to schedule some time out of town for myself and get in touch with the natural world. God has provided so much for us to see and experience outside of the human-made things we have created.

It is a clear demonstration of the depth and breadth of God's creation, and while we seek to understand, we also recognize the complexity of the world around us.

In other words, the world itself is not black and white.

One example that we can use to demonstrate this complexity and the grey areas of our world is to think about a river.

What makes and defines a river? Is just one drop of water considered a river? Of course not.

But what about a small running stream? Generally we don't think streams are rivers, and usually streams are not plotted on maps.

Humans have constructed what constitutes a river, and scientists probably have very specific criteria for what defines a body of water as a river, and when that happens.

But, what about rivers that flow into larger bodies of water like lakes? At what point exactly does the river become the lake?

The house I lived in back in Wisconsin was along a river. That river flowed into a larger lake. When taken as a whole, you can definitely tell that there is a change from a running river to a calmer lake. But where exactly is that point when the water molecules that were a river have now become water molecules that make up a lake?

It's a bit of a grey area. If you followed one molecule of water as it flowed down the river, there is not an exact point that you could say okay, now that molecule is no longer a river water molecule, but it has become a lake molecule. This transition happens, but at what point exactly, it's almost impossible to say.

God has designed our world with great complexity. We have moved through centuries, making scientific discoveries and advancements that help us make better sense of the world, but the complexity of God's creation is still something that we can be in awe of.

These examples of the complexity and beauty of God's design follow the example that we received in Genesis. Genesis was written by humans who did not understand the world in the same way that we do now. And, what we understand today will seem like almost nothing compared to what people 5 generations from now will understand about the world.

God has graciously partnered with humanity to provide ongoing care for this creation. Human beings are stewards for God's creation. Many people read Genesis and understand that God first created man, and then from man's rib, God created a second being, and *man* named that being woman. God didn't name her, man did.

Much like we cannot pinpoint exactly where the river becomes the lake, it can be difficult for us to understand from this passage in Genesis exactly where man becomes human. God designs a body - a shell - but it isn't until God breathes breath into that body that it becomes man. Was the body of man still a man prior to having life breathed into it by God?

The Genesis story is a story which leaves out many of the nuances and complexities of creation. We simplify the story so that our human minds can try to comprehend, and we assume that we can envision what exactly was happening. But, when we envision this story, we can only use what we currently know about our world.

We have to remember that this story took place in a time and place that we cannot truly picture, no matter how hard we try to see it on our mind's eye. If we consider some of the natural examples that we see today, like the Grand Canyon, we recognize that God's creation is complex, beautiful, and not something we can fully comprehend.

And, this is by design. Our first of the six essentials is that God is our Creator. We believe as Christians that God is creator, and we believe that God's creation is good. It is easy for us to recognize the complexities of God's creation when we look at the natural world, but it can also be easy to forget that God created humanity with the same level of complexity.

We were each uniquely designed by God, and we consist of our own unique complexities. This belief in God as our Creator is essential to our Christian identities and it is the first essential thing because, without it, nothing else would exist. Our understanding of the world would be vastly different.

God created humanity in God's image, but God is something we can never fully comprehend. Therefore, we cannot assume we know everything about what God was thinking when God created an individual person. Genesis shows us why it is essential that we believe in, and *trust*, God as our creator, and why we can be comfortable not understanding every complexity about creation.

If we are like Isabella, we can recognize that perfection is not always necessary, and in fact something sharp and new, not symmetrical or perfect, can help us see the intricate beauty of creation in ways we might not have if we expected perfection. This is true for humanity as well - for ourselves and for others. We

were not made to be perfect. We were made such that we can have our own thoughts, feelings, and actions that lead us down various paths in our lives. Sometimes, we are sharp!

And because humans are capable of free thought, we are also capable of doing and saying things that might not always be our best selves. And yet, we are perfectly made in God's image. God's love for us and our imperfections - our sharp edges and our inconsistencies, and all the things that make us uniquely us - allows us to just be. To just be loved by God, and to love and care for God and God's creation.

If you have heard nothing else from today's message hear this:

You are beautifully made by God. You are loved by our Creator. Perfection is not necessary. You are wholly loved and cared for regardless of the choices you have made in your life. May you never forget this. Amen.

Let us pray:

Creator God, we cannot possibly express our gratitude for your creation because we cannot fathom the magnitude of your creation. We must trust in your creation, God, and know that it is good, even if at times we question your work in ourselves and the world.

God we ask that in these times when we question your creation, you forgive us and help guide us to better understanding. We know that because you gave us free will, we do not always make the choices that you would have us make. We also know that you love us despite our mistakes and imperfections.

God we ask that you relieve our anxiety over the things we cannot possibly know or understand, and we ask that you help us to love others in the way that you ask us to, setting aside what we think we know about your design.

Please guide us to be good stewards of your creation and of the resources you have provided for us. With gratitude, we pray all of this in your name. Amen.