

Tell Me The Story: *The Kingdom of Shalom* - week 4

Rev. Scott McGinnis - First Presb. Church of Newton, KS - Sept. 19, 2021

Read Genesis 2:4-25.

In Genesis 1-11, we have the story that makes sense of all our stories. And we see what and who we were created to be. In these chapters, we hear the life-giving news that the universe did not “just happen.” We were created. We were created for a relationship with God and relational wholeness with others. As Jesus said in a paraphrase of the Beatitudes, **“Blessed are those who crave relational wholeness.”** Here we see why we desire that relational wholeness: it’s part of what it means to be human.

Today we’re considering Genesis 2, here we are given a huge picture of what it means to be “fully human and fully alive.” Notice how the story is introduced. There is no other story like it in all of literature, for we’re zooming in at creation to the creation of humanity.

There is a shift in the phraseology, signaling this zoomed in change of perspective: **“This is the account of the heavens and the earth when they were created, in the day that the Lord God made earth and heaven”** (Genesis 2:4). There’s a shift from the “heavens and earth” of chapter 1 to “**earth and heaven**” in chapter 2. The viewpoint is now from below: earth to heaven. God is now intimately engaged in the work of creation. He is creating through hands-on involvement from the ground.

In Genesis 2, God is a potter, forming Adam out of the dust. God is breathing into Adam His breath of life. God is a gardener planting trees and a rancher shaping diverse animals. God is an artist shaping the captivating beauty of woman from Adam's rib.

Then we have the phrase in verse 4, **“This is the account of the heavens and the earth...”**. Literally **“These are the generations of...”**, which is a phrase repeated ten times in Genesis. This was a way of saying, ***“This is what happened to the universe after God created everything ‘very good.’”***

We were created to reflect the nature and character of God in and to the world. The rest of the creation is to look at us and see something of God's nature and character. What about God's nature and character are we created to reflect? Here are a few we see here: the capacity to create, the capacity to categorize, to conceptualize, to communicate, to care, and the capacity to discern and decide. And then especially, we reflect the relational nature of God.

The living God is a Community, a Fellowship. At the center of all things is a Relationship, and we were made by the Relationship, for the Relationship, to enjoy life in the Relationship. You can capitalize the “R” in Relationship, because God is relational. The Trinity gets at this relational understanding of God. And this is no small thing, because this is one of the most fundamental things the Scriptures tell us about being human.

But when we think about how well we reflect that Relationship, we find we both grieve over what we've become and yet we rejoice because of Jesus and our restoration hope. When we consider the state of many human relationships, we begin to long for the "*right-related-ness*" God has within the Trinity. If we could just see life-giving, selfless love being lived in our world. We want our relationships restored and the relationships of our loved ones to be healed and restored.

Now what relationships are we talking about? In Genesis 2, we learn we were created for four basic relationships.

First, we were made for a relationship with the earth: "**Then the LORD God formed man of dust from the ground**" (Genesis 2:7). We are physical, material, ecological creatures. The Hebrew word for human is *adam*; the Hebrew word for earth is *adamah*. Our welfare is tied up with the welfare of the earth.

Second, we were made for a relationship with other human beings. "**It is not good for the man to be alone**" (Genesis 2:18, 22). We are social creatures. None of us is whole in isolation; we were created for community. The Hebrew word for man is *ish*; the Hebrew word for woman is *ishah*. We were made for fellowship with others in the image of our relational God. This means man (*ish*) is not human-in-the-image-of-God until woman (*ishah*) is made. But does this mean we have to be married to be fully human? Right after God presents the woman to the man,

the story does speak of marriage: **“A man shall leave his father and mother, and be joined to his wife; and they shall become one flesh”** (Genesis 2:24). But the text is not saying that only the married are humanity in the image of God. It is simply saying that we cannot be fully human unless male and female live in co-humanity. We need one another in our lives. This is humanity.

Third, we were made for a relationship with the self: **“And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed”** (Genesis 2:25). “Naked and not ashamed” was the Middle Eastern way of saying, *“I can be who I am and not be ashamed.”* We were created to be able to look at ourselves - body, mind, heart, and soul - and say, *“Oh, what a work of beauty you are!”* We were originally made to embrace ourselves as beloved without any guilt or shame.

And fourth, and most fundamentally, we were made for a loving relationship with our Heavenly Father, the Living God. Truly this relationship holds all the other relationships together. Without this relationship, none of the other relationships work. **“Then the LORD God formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life”** (Genesis 2:7).

We are spiritual creatures, designed for trusting, obeying, enjoying, loving, and experiencing God’s own delight in being Father to us. That is what God is offering to you and to me. This is God’s life, this is God’s substance, His

personal power and gentle care, available to you and me. Note that this was part of creation in the beginning, before we had done or not done anything. This is God's design for living. God breathing into us life and love. This then is NOT a try harder relationship. This is us inviting more of God into parts of our story.

Christian salvation is then the repairing and restoring of this genuine connection with God. This relationship was intended for us **"In the beginning."** This relationship intended for our sustenance, for our joy. We are the ones who are invited to be saved for this relationship.

So then what kind of relationship is this? We can compare it to a mother who delights in her child. There's a joy that fills us when we know we are valued and loved, whether we're an infant or an elder or middle-aged. We see this kind of loving relationship revealed to us in God's words of Isaiah 55. These are God's words for God's people,

"Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost. Why spend money on what is not bread, and your labor on what does not satisfy? Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good, and you will delight in the richest of fare."

We are made for this Relationship with a capital R at the center of the universe. This loving relationship. I've heard it said of God that 1 Corinthians 13 describes this loving

character of God for us. Here's a paraphrase, replacing the word love with God,

**God never gives up.
 God cares more for others than for self.
 God doesn't want what it doesn't have.
 God doesn't strut,
 Doesn't have a swelled head,
 Doesn't force itself on others,
 Isn't always "me first,"
 Doesn't fly off the handle,
 Doesn't keep score of the sins of others,
 Doesn't revel when others grovel,
 Takes pleasure in the flowering of truth,
 Puts up with anything,
 Always looks for the best,
 Never looks back,
 But keeps going to the end.**

We are bankrupt without this love.

Genesis tells us we were made for a holistic relationship: A right-relatedness with the created world; A right-relatedness with other humans; A right-relatedness with our inner selves; And a right-relatedness with our Heavenly Father.

When we read the biblical story we catch on to God's own hunger and thirst for this complete right-relatedness. Why? Because He loves us. We also cannot read the

whole biblical story without encountering the Father's grief. Why? Because of His loving care for us.

Our world is marked by so much unrighteousness: alienation, estrangement, manipulation, fear, hatred, violence, and death. Why? Because we have turned our backs on our relationship with our Creator. Really? Yes, and this causes all the other relationships to unravel. But when we know, as Jesus tells us, we have a Heavenly Father who loves us always, who welcomes us home, we can begin to restore these four relationships.

Tell me The Story that makes sense of all our stories: We were created for a loving relationship with the Living God. ***“Blessed are those who, like God, hunger and thirst for this full-ordered relational righteousness.”*** For this right-relatedness. When we receive God's love and grace, then that relationship begins to hold all our other relationships together.

To conclude: this fourfold right-relatedness with self, others, creation, and God is what is meant by the Hebrew word *shalom*. It is what the Bible means when it uses the words **"kingdom of God."** And it is why Jesus comes into our world. He can make all these four relationships work again. He is the savior and helper humanity has been waiting for. His Life makes us "fully human, fully alive."

Would you pray with me?

Father God, we ask You to meet us now, we want to hear of Your love for us. Minister to our hearts that we would know Your goodness and love. We ask You to help restore these relationships we have: our relationship with You, our relationship with ourselves, our relationship with each other, and with the created world. You are always orchestrating a path to save, restore, free, and release prisoners from darkness. We hold on to Your promise of salvation and desire You to revitalize all our relationships by Your love and grace. In Jesus Name, Amen.