

Overview

While there are many creation and redemption stories in Scripture, the two creation stories outlined in Genesis 1-3 present different insights into how we imagine God's creative and redemptive work and our part in it. We will explore the different ways there are of reading and interpreting them (Genesis 1:1-2.4a and Genesis 2:4b-3, 24) and explore the implications for how we deal with the complexities and challenges of daily work. We will also reflect on how these creation stories have shaped our attitudes to our everyday work and life.

This is your worksheet; for notes, ideas and questions

Facilitator

Offer a quick overview of this session and note that there are other Topics in this series that relate to the wider question of work and how we connect our faith with our work. Some issues that may come up in discussion will need to be dealt with in another session.

Remind people that the worksheet is for their use and notes only. Ensure introductions if there are new group members

Facilitator

As a way into this topic, invite the group to compare the following prayers from the liturgy of Nine Lessons and Carols in the Anglican church. Lead a discussion as to the differences. Creation and redemption go together- they are inseparable. The focus on our disobedience and how the church reads this will be explored as we look at the creation narratives.

Reflection on Creation and Redemption

In the Anglican Church's liturgy of the Nine Lessons and Carols, there is an interesting and subtle difference. In one version of the Bidding Prayer it says:

"Let us read and mark in Holy Scripture the story of God's love in creation and redemption, love incarnate in this holy child."

While in another version we find this:

"Therefore let us read and mark in Holy Scriptures the tale of the loving purposes of God from the first days of our disobedience unto the glorious redemption brought us by this Holy Child."

Discussion

What is the difference and which of these prayers do you prefer and why?

Facilitator

Lead a discussion to explore the differences between these prayers

Facilitator

Participants should have read Genesis 1:1 – 2:4a and then Genesis 2:4b – end 3 (Either use own bibles or a handout is available to download). This should ideally be done as preparation for the session, or can be done first in the session). It would be helpful for people to have the passages in front of them.

Question

There are two stories of Creation. These are Genesis 1.1-2.4a and 2.4b-3.24, which includes the story of the Fall.

What are some of the differences between the two accounts?

Facilitator

Read the perspective below. Explore how *The Fall* has been interpreted in people's Christian experience, how this has affected their view of work sense of partnership with God

Perspective

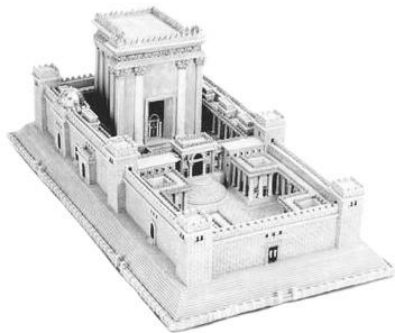
A Perspective on Our Understanding of Creation and Redemption in The Fall

The Two Stories of Creation

There are two stories of Creation. These are Genesis 1.1-2.3 and 2.4-3.24, which includes the story of the Fall. It is important to note that the story of the Fall belongs within the second Creation Story in what is an integrated narrative.

1. The First Creation story has, as its context the worship of God in the Tabernacle, and subsequently the Temple. It comes from a priestly source that celebrates Israel's offering of worship in creation to God its creator. Here mankind is the high priest of creation. The celebration of the glory of God in creation is akin to Psalm 104, and Job 38-41. And it is a theme reflected in Christ in the hymn in Colossians 1.15ff.

The temple, and before that the tabernacle, played a very significant part in Israel's life. It was the place where the creator God met his people and the glory of God in human



living was restored by a prescribed system sacrifice and offering. The original tabernacle or tent of meeting, and the subsequent temple, was constructed to reflect the six days of creation. The veil in the temple that separated the Holy of Holies from the worship space was woven to reflect the colours of creation, colours that matched the garb of the high priest. In this understanding, creation is drawn to worship its creator. The temple's celebration of a moral universe was by gathering encouragements and advice for the worshipper based on the assistance of

angels and of heavenly wisdom; (and we should remember that it was Solomon who built the temple). This is reflected in the opening of John's Gospel where the Logos holds all things and all things are held in the Logos, that becomes flesh and "tabernacles amongst us".

From this narrative we can suggest that work reflects the glory of God, since it celebrates primarily creation as the work of God.

2. The second (longer) Creation-and-Fall story brings a different perspective. For one thing, in this story God's creativity is marked by an adaptive response. Compared with the first creation narrative, it is experimental, and in contrast to the ordering and disposition of things, it works with an exchange of understanding between God and the human. Significantly, the human is set to work (2.15) in the garden. And, from the context of work, all the plants, trees and animals and birds appear within his world for the man to recognise and name. And then at last the man's own counterpart appears in woman. There is a process underway in this creation story. It is imbued with an awareness of context, and of a



divine resourcefulness within it. (By way of a resonance with the first Creation story it is worth remembering that where it says God saw all that he had made was good, this means not “perfect” (and it almost certainly does not mean “perfect”), but as in the original Hebrew sense, “sound”. In other words the celebration of God’s glory does not rule out the continuing process of God’s creativity.)

This second Creation story then continues with the narrative of the Fall. Here the idea of a moral universe is based on obedience to a commandment. However, the warning by God not to eat the fruit of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil is not so much a



commandment but a “narrative statement after the fact” that humanity will forever be wrestling with moral issues in the call of creativity, freedom and responsibility. The commandment of God not to eat the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of

good and evil is a rhetorical device (more in the style of a statement than an outright commandment, in fact), that accepts that this is exactly what will inevitably happen. (An illustration can be found in Paul in Romans 7.7ff where he says he would not have known what it was to covet if the commandment “Do not covet” had not been given!) Humanity is commanded (following the style of the second Creation story) to be constantly working, experimenting, discovering the boundaries of what makes for right and wrong. Adam and Eve’s duty is to work, and since work is fundamental to human experience it brings the experience of the knowledge of good and evil.

The Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil is a metaphor for an awareness that to be born is to die, and that this dynamic is related to a sense of an un-satisfactoriness about life as a “predicament”. The predicament is centred on the idea that humanity is capable of responding to God’s address to us, but is incapable of carrying out the divine intention in our own strength.

To partake of human experience is to be within a predicament that is modelled in some sense in a struggle to find a sustained communion with God – cf. the belief, as in Proverbs 3.18 that wisdom is a tree of life, and thus the possibility of a wise life being the path to the true “knowledge of good and evil”.

But none of this makes work a punishment for sin nor does it suggest that human endeavour is to be viewed pessimistically. The story of the Second Creation and Fall Story is a) making a claim for the necessity of relying on grace, and b) is a call to live wisely by faith in God.

Revd Dr Jim Francis; ‘The Two Stories of Creation’ written for After Sunday, 2009

Facilitator

There is a lot to wrestle with here. The headline summary of all this is that in the first creation story, everything is good – not perfect and it has no ‘fall’ story attached to it. In the second story, God is seen as an experimenter who tries things out with Adam. This is less about a focus on the supremacy of God and more of an invitation to journey with God in discipleship. Whatever people feel about the ‘fall’, the issue that we would like to focus on is less about explaining the causes of sin and evil and more about how we respond to the inevitability of them in a compromised and

imperfect life. It is very often in our work that we are faced with some of the most challenging and compromising situations.

Question

What are some ‘real life’ examples of the human predicament that we encounter in daily work?

Facilitator

Encourage people to share examples of struggles and challenges that are confronted at work. The closer to home and the real experience of the group members the better. Examples may be heavy industry/environmental damage, food waste/starving nations, parenting, job loss/saving companies.

Perspective

Collaborating with God

‘Our very protest, agony and near despair in the face of so many manifestations of the problems of evil are given their depth and desperate poignancy because of what we see and share..... because of what we can imagine and enter into through risk and creativity. All of these things promise so much more. Our lives in this world are full of the possibilities of passion.....All this is matched, muddled and marred by passions of cruelty, selfishness, lust and exploitation, and by the sheer destructiveness of randomness.....Surely there is sufficient basis within the paradoxes and possibilities of our lives for daring to look around, to look deeper, further for signs, glimpses and promises of what I will call compassion. A compassion which will struggle alongside us to reinforce and redeem our passion for love and goodness’

‘For me, Jesus is the clinching and convincing demonstration of the Compassion of God...he personally lives out and demonstrates to us that God is with us in the passion of love and longing...God is involved in the suffering arising from the evil passions which distort, thwart and seem to deny the passions of love and justice.....God does not distance himself from these struggles.....The purposes and promises of compassionate love are to be wrestled with and God, in collaboration with all those prepared to join with Him, wrestles against all the things that deny such love’

‘It is not true to say that whatever happens in this world is “in accordance with the will of God”, It is only true to say that whatever happens, you can collaborate with God to draw his will out of it’

From ‘Good God! Bishop David Looks Ahead; Lecture 2 God in the Mess’ by Rt Revd David Jenkins, (Diocese of Durham 1994)

Facilitator

This is an opportunity to ground the learning from this session into everyday experience. Invite one of the members of the group to suggest a topic

Question

Take an example of a messy situation from work (from one of the group members)

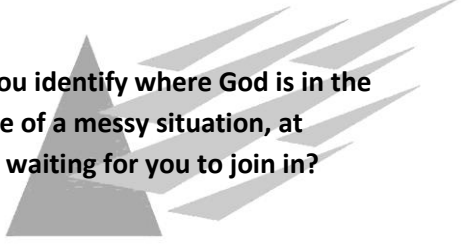
What do you think God's will is in this situation, and how might you collaborate with him to draw it out?

Facilitator

Highlight the sense that God is already in the middle of the mess, we are not bringing hope into situations, we are just trying to reveal the hope that is already there. We are not taking God in to a situation, he is already there, we are looking for transformational change in a situation, not simply an opportunity to sort things into 'good' and 'bad'.

Facilitator

During the week, you might like to reflect on :



Can you identify where God is in the middle of a messy situation, at work, waiting for you to join in?

Facilitator

Encourage people to spend few minutes pondering on what they feel they have learned from the session and ask them to share quickly 1 or 2 points.

Ponder

What did you learn this session?

Prayer

Prayer of St Francis

Lord, may we be instruments of your peace.

Where there is hatred may we sow love

Where there is injury, pardon.

where there is doubt, faith

Where there is despair, hope

Where there is darkness, light.

Where there is sadness, joy.

O Divine master, grant that we may not so much see

to be consoled as to console;

to be understood as to understand;

to be love as to love.

For it is in giving that we receive

It is in pardoning that we are pardoned;

And it is in dying that we are born to eternal life. **Amen**