

“Defining Eden”

Genesis 2: 4-25

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Welcome to week three in Genesis. David and I both preached Genesis Chapter 1, and now we move forward to Chapter 2. Did you hear echoes of last week’s story in today’s reading? Genesis 1 and 2 have many similarities: God creates the heavens, the earth, vegetation, animals, birds, and humans.

And of course there are differences between the chapters. Do you remember *when* God creates humans in Genesis 1? Is it first? Second? How about last? In perhaps early evening of the 6th day God says, “[L]et us make humankind in our image.” God creates *them*, not just one human but plural *them*, blesses *them*, looks at all of creation, beholds it is good, *very good*, and finally rests.

Genesis 1 is like a fireworks display: it begins with a first explosion of beauty and wonder. It builds and builds until it ends with the flourish of the grand finale. That’s us in Genesis 1: we’re the grand finale of Creation.

When, in Genesis 2, does God create the first person? Hint: not during the grand finale. In this story, God begins with earth and heavens. Next is one human, then the garden of Eden, trees, animals and birds.

God makes a place for us, makes us, and then God begins to decorate. God says in verse 18, “It is not good that the human, “adam,” should be alone; I will make the human a helper as a partner.” So God makes animals and birds and brings them to the man to name them. Despite their glorious intricacies, the animals and birds are not enough; God sees the human needs a more complex relationship. A-dam needs a partner, a true equal. So God makes a second human from the first human’s rib and brings her to the man.

Imagine the man’s response when he beholds, for the first time, another person. After countless species of animals and birds, God presents to “adam” a human. What feeling must have swelled up inside him? Wonder?

Fascination? Tremendous relief? Did he gaze upon this newly created being and experience a completeness he didn't know was possible? The man says, "This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh."

The two humans are bonded. They see themselves in each other's eyes, the mirror image of equals. Creation is now complete. In this story, there is no mention of God resting, and I wonder if the excitement of this match, this final piece of the puzzle fitting perfectly in place, creates more exhilaration than exhaustion. Who can rest after such an amazing accomplishment?

This story, *our story*, in Genesis 2 is human focused: it is told for people about people. God does not slowly build to the creation of a human; God gets right to it. And Creation is incomplete until there are two humans. In other words, from the beginning, relationship between humans has been essential to living a full life.

That's not to say being alone is by itself a bad thing. Being alone with our thoughts, free of distraction, is relaxing. But being alone while yearning for companionship and finding none, is to be lonely. And loneliness can be toxic.

Scientists estimate that 1 in 4 people over 65 are socially isolated. And of course you need not be retirement age to experience loneliness. Chronic loneliness and isolation are associated with increased risk of heart disease (29%) and stroke (32%), a higher likelihood of dementia (50%), a weakened immune system, obesity, high blood pressure, anxiety, and depression. Social disconnection increases mortality risk by more than 60%.ⁱ Loneliness and isolation have the same detrimental effect on your well-being as smoking 15 cigarettes a day.ⁱⁱ

In 2001, the film *Castaway* received two Oscar nominations. *Castaway* stars a gregarious, extroverted Tom Hanks as Chuck Noland, a FedEx employee who is the sole survivor of a plane wreck. Marooned on an island, Chuck barely exists for four years. The key to his survival, to maintaining his sanity, is his creation of another "being" named Wilson. Wilson is a volleyball, an inanimate object marked with a red stain in the shape of a human face with

two eyes, a mouth, and crazily spiked hair. Chuck suspends reality and pretends Wilson-the-volleyball is human to satisfy his craving for a conversation partner, co-conspirator, and co-creator in day to day living.

We as a species need companionship. We need someone to witness our lives, to listen, challenge our thoughts, and endorse our choices. Chuck imagines that Wilson thinks, responds, argues, and laughs at his jokes. He imbues Wilson with all these qualities despite Wilson's lack of heart, mind, or breath. Chuck needs Wilson so that though he is alone, he is not utterly lonely.

We humans need water, food, shelter, and complex relationship. So much so, that in Genesis 2, even God seems anthropomorphic, an embodied Creator who gestures and moves like us. How did your mind "see" the story as the Al and Tricia read the scripture. Did God close God's eyes, smile, and imagine the earth and heaven into being? Did God bend down to the ground and scoop up dust? God shapes the soil, molding it hand over hand, into a body. And God leans over that newly sculpted face and, "breaths into his nostrils the breath of life." Like an emergency technician administering CPR, God fills the lungs of adam with air.

(If you read ahead, Genesis 3 describes, "the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden at the time of the evening breeze" and calling to the man, "Where are you?")

These human-like qualities we place onto God remind us this is a story for humans about humans. The wider focus is the importance of all types of relationship: between God and the earth, between God and the human, between the human and the Garden, between one human and another, and eventually the relationship between all of humanity.

Our God places a premium on relationship. In Matthew 18:20, Christ invites us to gather, noting that "[W]here two or three are gathered together in my name, there I am with them." People, hear the good news: church is the physical manifestation of this holy relationship, a place where God invites us

to never be lonely, to worship God's own self and be in the company of other humans.

Today's Saint Luke's program year kickoff showcases more than 40 different ministries. There's a place for everyone to join others in Christ's ministry through this church.

Near the end of *Castaway*, Chuck Nolan sets out on a raft, seeking the company of others. He takes with him two items: an unopened FedEx package decorated with a drawing of wings, and Wilson-the-volleyball, his playmate and conversation partner. When a mighty storm steals Wilson away and leaves Chuck adrift and alone, Chuck feels he's lost his only friend. In profound grief, he collapses on his raft, sobbing, and gives up his desire to live.

I suspect the remaining wing-emblazoned FedEx package represents God's unfailing presence with Chuck, floating alongside this bereft, grieving character. Maybe because the package has wings, or maybe because of Hollywood screenwriting, Chuck and the winged package are found floating in the middle of the ocean by a cargo ship. Chuck returns to civilization, to live, much more quietly, in relationship with other humans.

God placed the human in Eden and realized we need someone to tend the garden with us. Ministry is what we do together, to bring forth abundance.

Our Eden is this sanctuary, where we are draped with the cloak of Christ, illuminated in the presence of our Creator, empowered by the Holy Spirit, and gifted with the presence of one another. Here, or wherever we are with one another in Christ's name, we live a full life. Come be a part of it. In this Eden, all are invited to abundance.

Amen.

ⁱ <https://www.nia.nih.gov/news/social-isolation-loneliness-older-people-pose-health-risks>, accessed August 5, 2026

ⁱⁱ <https://seniorsite.org/resource/why-elderly-isolation-has-become-a-silent-crisis-and-what-we-can-do-about-it>, accessed August 5, 2026.