

“God of Both/And”

Genesis 1: 1 – 2: 4

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One preaching delight is every scriptural passage is so rich, so layered, that 100 different sermons could spring from it. And so every week as we write our sermons, Rev. Dr. David Lower and I narrow down to what God’s word is for Saint Luke’s today. It’s hard to preach just one sermon on a Biblical passage. So, David and I are having some fun this August. This week I’ll preach Genesis 1, and next week David will preach Genesis 1. August 16th, I’ll preach Genesis 2 and August 23rd, David will preach Genesis 2. You’ll hear back to back sermons on the same text, but each sermon will be unique.

And where better to start than IN THE BEGINNING? Saint Luke’s will use the Narrative Lectionary this year, meaning our chosen scripture each Sunday will be in narrative order, beginning with Genesis in September and finishing next May with Paul’s letter to the Romans. Today we begin with those first holy words, starting with Chapter 1, verse 1, as they speak to us in this time and place. Today we start with the most basic question: “What do we believe?”

Here are two choices. Either we believe, “The world was created about four thousand years ago. In six days God made the world with all the kinds and species of things that were ever to exist in it. God made the earth like a flat disk with all the mountains and valleys we see, and the sky like an inverted bowl over it. Below the earth and above the sky were oceans of water. God put the sun and moon and stars in the bowl. Then God made all the plants and animals and finally human beings.”ⁱ This is what we just heard from Genesis.

Or . . . “About four billion years ago our planetary system developed out of a disk-shaped mass of gas surrounding the sun. The earth is only one of millions of stars in a universe in which distance is measured in light years. Most of the forms of life that exist on the infinitesimal speck that is our earth did not formerly exist at all, and many of those that used to exist no longer exist. The

human race is at least one hundred thousand years old.”ⁱⁱ This is the general view we understand through actual measurements and research science.

So which is it, Saint Luke’s? Are we four thousand or four billion years old? Should we all stand up and move so our 4000 year believers are all seated on the right and our 4 billion year believers are seated on the left? There’s a big aisle running right down the middle of our sanctuary and you need to choose. It’s either 4000 or 4 billion. Either...or.

That’s a trick our brains play on us, the need to choose between one thing and another. The premise is we live in a binary world where we are right or wrong, good or bad, strong or weak...and these binary choices extend into politics and gender and faith and tribal identity. We don’t know WHY we created this binary, this either/or way, but God bless us, it swallows us whole. And though the Bible tells us, again and again, that either/or decisions do not lead to a full life, we just can’t help ourselves.

We can’t get past the first two sentences of Genesis before we must choose sides. Those of you who learned scripture as a kid likely have the first words of the Bible memorized: “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” In our bones we know that phrase is Biblical. It’s how sacred text begins.

But those aren’t the words Gary and Carol read to us. They read, “***When God began to create the heavens and the earth, the earth was complete chaos.....***”ⁱⁱⁱ

So which is it? How does the story launch? Does Genesis start at the **very** beginning before there was anything other than God and God initiates creating with heaven and earth? Or does Genesis open after God has long existed alongside chaos? God’s decision to create heaven and earth is where our story begins. Only God? Or God and chaos? Because one must be right and one must be wrong. It’s either this or that. Right?

Jewish scholar, Dr. Amy Robertson, and Christian scholar, Dr. Robert Williamson Jr., say the right answer is – of course – that we don’t know for

sure.^{iv} Did God create heaven and earth and then start organizing the chaos into order? Or did God look at the chaos already there and decide to create heaven and earth from it so we could have a place to call home.

We don't have a definitive answer because this story existed for thousands of years before it was first written down. We weren't there when the story was told for the first time, so we don't know when the storyteller paused while speaking. Come to think of it, the first storyteller did not yet exist in Gen 1: 1, so even that first speaker didn't know. This story begins with God and moves from spoken form to basic written Hebrew to Hebrew with vowels to Greek to Latin to English. We are only on the first few sentences of a very long book and already which version, which interpretation to choose seems impossible. The **exact** answer, the **right** answer, simply isn't here: it cannot be measured or calculated.

People hear the good news: the Spirit of God who hovered over the waters in Genesis hovers over this congregation this morning. This is the living, breathing word for Saint Luke's in Dunwoody in August of 2026. Hear our story.

God became ready for relationship. Relationship with an entirely new, created, amazingly beautiful world. So God creates the world, in six days or 4 billion years, from chaos. And over and over again, God sees it is good.

On day 1, God sees the light is GOOD. Then the earth and seas are GOOD. All vegetation, trees, and seeds, GOOD. God sees the sun, moon, and stars are GOOD. Sea monsters, water creatures, birds, GOOD. Cattle, creeping things, animals, GOOD.

And not done quite yet, perhaps in the late afternoon of the sixth day, God creates humans in God's own image. And God looks around at all of creation and observes, again, that it is **good. Very good.**

God creates it all and declares it all **good**. Not part good and part bad. Not some bits better than others. No, God says ALL of creation is **very good**. This chosen act, to produce all the world and with a final flourish bless us humans with life, comes from God's desire for relationship. In moving from chaos to

creation, God embraces the role of painter, poet, potter, architect, and dreamer. This world is an embarrassment of riches, more than we will ever know or understand.

And while we cannot grasp the immeasurable generosity of God's doing, we can observe the singular shining quality of abundance. Rather than limiting creation, choosing between ideas in either/or fashion, God liked what God saw and just kept going. And since we didn't show up until almost quitting time on day 6, thank goodness God didn't stop.

Our God is a God of both/and. What defines us as we walk out of this sanctuary is not the specific Hebrew, but the tone of the origin story itself. The answer to the question, "What do we believe" is not either 4000 or 4 billion. The answer is not based on facts but is grounded in God. What we believe is this: We come from good. From relationship. From love. From abundance. And it is to that attitude of both/and that we are called as Christians.

And as we turn to the table, we remember the both/and nature of Christ. He is generous. Welcoming. Forgiving. Merciful. Christ invites us to release our either/or attitude. To follow Him supersedes all worldly mandated choices. Our only identity is *we are followers of Jesus the Christ*.

And He says to us, to all, "Come. Eat. Drink. Be at peace." May we say yes, we will eat AND drink AND be at peace. And as Christians we will share that peace abundantly with one another AND with all those with whom we share God's **very good** creation. Amen.

ⁱ Shirley C. Guthrie, Christian Doctrine, Revised Edition. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1994, p. 145.

ⁱⁱ Ibid.

ⁱⁱⁱ Genesis 1: 1-2.

^{iv} Rev. Dr. Robert Williamson, Jr. and Dr. Amy Robertson, BibleWorm Podcast, *Episode #701, Partners in Creation*, accessed July 25, 2026.