

Real Joy in the Presence of God

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Please consider donating to this work in the San Francisco Bay Area online at ChristChurchEastBay.org. Today's Old Testament lesson is from the book of Genesis.

Please follow along in your liturgy. In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty. Darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.

And God said, Let there be light. And there was light. Then God said, Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.

So God created mankind in his own image. In the image of God, he created them. Male and female, he created them. God blessed them and said to them, Be fruitful and increase in number.

[1 : 1 7] Fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground. God saw all that he had made, and it was very good.

And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day. Thus, the heavens and the earth were completed in all their vast array. By the seventh day, God had finished the work he had been doing.

So on the seventh day, he rested from all his work. Then God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done.

Then the Lord God formed a man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life. And the man became a living being.

Now the Lord God had planted a garden in the east, in Eden, and there he put the man he had formed. The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and take care of it.

[2 : 1 6] The Lord God said, It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him. So the Lord God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep, and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man's ribs and then closed up the place with flesh.

Then the Lord God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man. The man said, This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh.

She shall be called woman, for she was taken out of man. That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh.

Adam and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame. The grass withers and the flowers fade. Forever. Good morning.

Good morning. Good morning.

[3 : 3 6] Good morning. we wonder to ourselves, you know, what kind of power could produce something so achingly beautiful that it reduces you to sheer wordless wonder?

Did all this beauty really happen by chance? And how did life begin without life to create it in the first place? Why is there anything here at all?

Why is there something and not nothing? Did you know that there are 300 billion stars in our Milky Way galaxy alone?

And that there are 2 trillion galaxies, which means that there are more stars in the universe than there are grains of sand on all the beaches on planet Earth. Did you know that our star, our sun's energy, its energy output every second is equivalent to the explosion of 91 billion hydrogen bombs every second?

And that if one out of six, out of the six physical constants that holds our fine-tuned universe together, if even one of those is off by even the smallest amount, our universe as it exists would cease to even be.

[4 : 56] You know, and it's not just these larger things that are truly remarkable, it's the smaller things in life as well. You know, the most extraordinary thing in the universe is actually inside your head.

This marvelous, complex brain that can process in 30 seconds more information than the Hubble Space Telescope has processed in the last 30 years.

In 30 seconds. That your eye can distinguish 7 to 10 million colors, and that that eye sends 100 billion signals to your brain every second.

Did you know that there are 75,000 miles of blood vessels crammed inside of you? And there are at least 50 trillion cells.

And that if you were to take all the DNA contained in your cells, and you were to stretch them out, they would reach 10 billion miles away, all the way past Pluto, which actually means that there's enough of you here today to go outside of our solar system, if you could find a way to do it.

[6 : 11] You are amazing. You are a work of art. And if you saw something of that, that's that stunning in a portrait gallery. If you heard something that beautiful in a concert hall, you would instinctively ask yourself, where did it come from?

Who created it? And if someone were to tell you that this incredible painting, this amazing symphony, that it just came together by itself, without any author to create it, would you believe them?

You know, the opening line of our book tells us who the artist is, who created the massive universe that we live in, the marvelous bodies that we inhabit. And what I'm about to attempt to do is so crazy, it's so stupid, to try to preach one sermon on the whole text that we just read.

But I'm going to do that. And what we are going to ask ourselves is three simple questions. Who is the one true God? Who are God's one special people?

And what is the one future that God has for his world? Who is the one true God? Who are his one special people? And what is the one future that God has for his world?

[7 : 32] So first of all, who's the one true God? Verse one says that, in the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. And we should say that, right off the bat, science and theology are neither strangers nor enemies, but they are friends and they are partners.

Right? Science deals with the what and the how. Theology deals with the who and the why. And what Moses is giving us is not science but theology.

What Moses is giving us is not deductive reasoning. He's giving us divine revelation. And what Moses tells us is that the central subject of all reality in the first line of the Bible is God himself.

Forty-six times God is mentioned in these first two chapters. God created, it says in verse one. God's spirit is moving, it says in verse two. God said in verse three.

It's all about God. From the very opening sentence, the Bible reveals this God who is both absolute and personal. If we could bring up this slide and just keep this slide up here until this point is over.

[8 : 42] I want you to consider this. What does it mean in verse one that God is just inexplicably there? He just is. He just was.

He just will be. And that he's creating everything out of nothing. It means that he's an absolute God who is infinitely and eternally great. He's overwhelmingly majestic and almighty.

That's the deep theology that's crammed into the very first line of the Bible. And what does it mean in verse two where it says God's spirit is moving and that without strain, without fatigue, he brings formlessness to form.

He brings emptiness to fullness. It means that he's self-existent, that he's all-powerful, that he does not need anything or anyone, that nothing's difficult for him, nothing's impossible for him, that he's an absolute God.

What does it mean in verse three when God's first words are, let there be light? It means that God himself is light and in him is no darkness at all.

[9 : 49] It means that he exercises his authority and his control to accomplish his will through his word. And that out of the fullness and the abundance of God's life-giving and life-creating presence, he makes and sustains every square inch of space, every nanosecond of time, every molecule of matter, and he says over it all, it's mine.

The God that's being presented to us is an absolute God, a transcendent God. But he's not just that. He's also a personal God. He's an imminent God.

What does it mean in verse 31 where it says God saw all that he made and it was very good? It means that God himself is very good. And that as a personal God, he wants to share the abundant overflow, the infinite goodness of himself with his creatures.

Or what does it mean in Genesis 2, 2, where it says that God blessed one day in seven and he set it apart as a time of holy rest for each and every one of us? Or when it says in chapter 2, verse 8, that he planted a garden called Eden.

Eden means pleasure. Eden means delight. And he put us in that place to make that our home and to provide food for us in that place.

[11:14] Or what does it mean in Genesis 2, 18, where it says that he made a family for us? He put us in a community. You know, if you study the origin stories of the Babylonians, the epic of Gilgamesh, the Enuma Elish, you'll find these gods in these stories that are actually quite needy.

They're fickle. They are deeply conflicted and violent and at war with one another. They actually depend on the humans that they make to give them food and to give them rest.

And very often they're either indifferent to the humans they've made or they're hostile to the humans they've made. And from the very first sentences of our Bible and throughout the Bible, repeatedly it says that the one true God is emphatically not like that.

That every experience you've ever had of light, every experience you've ever had of beauty or of goodness or of pleasure or of rest or of feeling at home, it all comes from the one true God.

And every single one of those experiences is an invitation from the heart of reality, from this sublime and exalted and unfathomable and absolute God who wants to be in a personal and intimate relationship with you as his beloved creature.

[12:43] He wants you to experience his covenant presence as a source of all blessing and life and joy and peace. And he knows that your heart is going to be restless until it finds his rest right there with him.

So how might we apply this to our lives this week? Well, first of all, what story will you wake up telling yourself tomorrow? What story will you wake up living in all day, Monday through Saturday this week?

Who will be the central subject of that story? Is the opening line of that story all about you or is it about God? If your story is all about you, then your story is way too small.

Right? If your story is all about you and your family, your ethnicity, your class, your gender, your vocational field, your political tribe, your nation, any of that, your story is way too narrow and way too cramped.

If your story is not about this absolute yet personal God who created everything in the beginning and who sustains everything day by day and who's directing all of nature and all of history to his own purposes and goals, then the invitation of Genesis 1 and 2 is to get your little story connected up with his larger story and to give yourself to the one who's actually been authoring your story all along and to say to this God, you know, you do not exist for me, I exist for you and you are my highest good that could possibly be imagined and I want you from today going forward to be the object of my worship and the theme of my song and the strength of my life because I realize today that from you and through you and to you are all things.

[14:45] See, Genesis 1 is an invitation for you to have your story re-narrated starting today.

Second application is how will you engage with the power of God's word when you start your days this week?

You know, UC Berkeley's motto since 1883 has been Fiat Lux from Genesis 1-3 and God said let there be light and there was light. God sovereignly and majestically created the universe by his powerful and authoritative word and when Israel would later receive the word of the Lord they knew that it was that same powerful and authoritative Fiat Lux of the creator God who calls things into existence that are not.

It is the word of God that formed the chaos into a cosmos. It's the word of God that turned the darkness into light. It's the word of God that called into existence an ordered and harmonious and fruitful creation.

And isn't that what you want your life to be? Ordered, harmonious and fruitful. That's what God's word does. How could I possibly if God's creative and redemptive work is accomplished through his powerful word how could I possibly ignore or neglect or even resist the word of God as he's given it

to us in the scriptures?

Friends, if you give yourself on a daily basis to your creator's word and you submit yourself to his will and you attune your way to his way and you order your life according to his divine ordering you can rest assured that your story is going to continue in the fiat lux in the light of God all of your days. [16:44] Psalm says your word is a lamp for my feet and it's a light on my path. Third application is this. Many people in the Bay Area say, you know, I don't believe in God and if somebody trusts you enough to say that you need to be prepared to say, well tell me about this God you do not believe in because I probably do not believe in him either.

Is your God absolute but not personal? Is your God personal but not absolute? Is your God holy but not loving?

Is your God kind but not powerful? See, I don't believe in any of those gods either. So what we can do right now is connect over our mutual disbelief in these false gods.

Fourth point of application is every student here from middle school to PhD candidate I want you to remember that the absoluteness of God is the basis of all science and mathematics and I want you to remember that the personalness of God is the basis of all the arts and the humanities and that it's this God who gives legitimacy and credibility to all rational inquiry and your job as a student this week is to go study your rear end off to the glory of God.

Amen? All right. That's point one. Who's the one true God? See, I told you this was the dumbest idea to try to do all this in one sermon. All right.

[18:21] Who are God's one special people? Who are God's one special people? The secular vision of humanity is a disenchanting vision.

It's a materialist and naturalist vision. And what it tells us is that we are lucky mud. That you are a random collocation of atoms.

A brain with legs. You're a meat suit walking around. You came from insignificance. You're going to insignificance. And that your final destiny is to become food for worms and fertilizer for flowers.

And the question is what if there's more to you than that? What if there's more to life than that? I want to point out this strange detail in the text and invite you to notice it in verse 26.

It says, then God said, let us make mankind. And that let us we call the royal we. It's a plural of majesty. It's God speaking to his royal heavenly court of angels.

[19:26] But in hindsight, it's also a little hint for us of the unity and diversity in the supreme being of God himself. If we could bring up another slide.

Psalm 33 6 says, by the word of the Lord the heavens were made, their starry host by the breath of his mouth. That sounds just like the first three verses of the Bible where it says, God created and the spirit was moving and God said with his word.

It's through these means of his word and his breath that the Lord makes the universe. And the New Testament says that Jesus is the word of God made flesh.

And that the Holy Spirit is the breath of God breathed out. So what does it mean if the Trinity, if this one God and three persons, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, the Lord, the word, and the breath, what if he's the one who created you?

Verse 26 says, 6 says, then God said, let us make human beings in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over everything. And verse 27 says, so God created human beings in his own image, in the image of God, he created them male and female, he created them.

[20:43] What you need to know is that in the ancient Near East, only the king was the image of God. Only the king was the image of God. But the very first page of our book says that all of you have been stamped with the royal image of the one who from eternity past has been pouring glory and love, from the father to the son and to the holy spirit, each into the other in this delightful dance of mutual self-giving.

You were made from love and for love. You were not made by someone who needed to have you. You were made by somebody who wanted you.

Think about that. What does it mean? You were not made from a unipersonal God of raw power who needs you in order for himself to be complete.

But rather you were made from this tri-personal God of pure love who wants you to enjoy the fullness of his being and presence, the trinity of these persons in relationship.

What does that mean? It means that you cannot know who you are. If you want to know who you are, you cannot know who you are apart from this triune love. But that if you do enter into that triune

mystery then it will change how you relate to yourself and everybody else.

[22 : 21] So how can we apply this practically? Well first of all, you have an objective, intrinsic, irreducible, inestimable glory about yourself.

That you are significant, that you are valuable, that you are worthy and that you matter. Genesis 2 7 says this, then the Lord God formed a man from the dust of the ground and he breathed into his nostrils the breath of life and the man became a living being.

You see as a potter forms a lump of clay, this humble creature of the dust is crafted by God into a work of art and then he's given the divine breath, the divine life, through this moment of face-to-face intimacy, this divine kiss, this amazing act of self-giving love.

And what does that mean? Well it means first of all that you are the image of God, that you're not God, you're dust. So don't think of yourself more highly than you ought.

But it also means that you're the image of God, that you share in the divine likeness, so do not think of yourself less than you ought. That's point number one.

[23 : 40] Application number one. Application number two is that basic human rights and equality, which we're kind of starting to lose our grip on in the western world.

Basic human rights and equality, the sanctity of life, none of this is predicated on age or status or achievements or class or race.

No, the imago Dei that's imprinted on you and on everyone else requires us to take all people absolutely seriously.

And it requires something even more than that. It requires us to protect the poor and the sick and the old and the disabled and the newborn and the unborn.

Secular people want to talk about human rights but they actually have cut themselves off from, they've cut the limb off of the tree for which they used to make that argument.

[24 : 44] You cannot make an argument for transcendent universal human rights without the transcendent universal God from whom they come. Secular people have to say, you know, the ground of rights is in our capacities.

And what we can do. But can you imagine Martin Luther King showing up in Atlanta or Birmingham or Montgomery and saying, you know, the basis of our human rights is our ability to reason and our self-consciousness.

No. He showed up quoting Moses. He showed up quoting Jesus. He wasn't quoting Buddha.

He wasn't quoting Aristotle. He said in a sermon on July 4th, 1965, he said, there are no gradations in the image of God. Every man from a treble white to a bass black is significant on God's keyboard precisely because every man is made in the image of God.

And one day we will all learn that. third point of application is that as the image of God, you are called to reflect and represent the glory of God into the world.

[26 : 00] Like a mirror with the sunshine. You are meant to capture the sunshine of God's character and his goodness and his light and his life and his love and reflect it out into the world.

And that is an awesome privilege and an awesome responsibility. It's a high honor that implies a code of living.

It implies an expectation to imitate God in your daily life. It says that you're designed for dignity and therefore God designed you to act dignified.

And that means that we have to ask ourselves as the image of God, should I be thinking this or saying that? As the image of God, should I be watching this or wearing that?

As the image of God, should I be doing this thing or acting that way? You're made to reflect and represent the image of the triune God's own self-giving and mutual respect that he has within himself.

[27 : 03] But of course the image of God is broken in me and it's broken in you, isn't it? Sin has twisted and tarnished the image of God in us.

Self-centeredness has come and shattered and soiled the image of God in us. And next Sunday we'll explore how Adam and Eve failed to be the covenant partners that they were meant to be.

And really what we're going to see is that the whole drama of Genesis, the whole drama of the whole Bible is that the family of Abraham and the nation of Israel were called to be a new humanity within the old humanity.

humanity. That God so loved the world that he gave Abraham. God so loved the world he gave Israel. But they failed in the same way. They failed to be the image of God reflecting the light of God

to the nations of God.

And finally after long years of waiting, Jesus, the Son of God, stepped out of heaven and onto the earth as the true human being. And that's why the New Testament calls Jesus the second Adam, the last Adam.

[28 : 10] He's the ultimate and greater Adam. He's the genuine Israelite. All that the sons of Abraham were meant to be. All that the sons of David were meant to be.

Jesus is the true image bearer of God. The only perfect image of God. Who's come to rescue and restore us to our intended identity and dignity.

He came to fulfill God's design for us to be all that we were meant to be but could not be. And he himself became broken.

He had his image broken on the cross in order that the image of God might be made whole again. And this is why the Apostle Paul says things like this.

He says the Son is the image of the invisible God. And God predestined us to be conformed to the image of his Son. And therefore you're to put on the new self in Jesus Christ.

[29 : 11] Which is being renewed in the knowledge and the image of its creator to be like God in true righteousness and true holiness. See that's why Jesus came.

That is what Jesus, God's one special person, made it possible for you to be and to become. So who's the one true God?

Who are God's one special people? And last thing is what is God's one future for his world? What is God's one future for his world?

I'll be quick. The secular vision of the future says that this life is all there is. And that everything is eventually going to burn up in the death of the sun and the solar system.

And that no one after that is going to be around to remember anything that happened and that everyone will be forgotten. And that nothing we do will make a difference and that all of our endeavors, even the best, will come to naught.

[30 : 16] And therefore, on the basis of that, we should fight poverty. Therefore, on the basis of that, we should seek for nuclear disarmament so we don't destroy ourselves.

Maybe that's part of the reason why there's such a rise in anxiety and depression. Because people don't know why they're here. They don't know what the future of the world is all about.

And Genesis 1 and 2 says actually, no, God exists and he has a plan, he has a purpose, he has a pattern for the image of God. And what is that? He says, well, it's to put men and women together. It's to put us together in families and extended communities in order to help each other serve God as his representatives in the world. And what is the work that God's calling us to do in these extended families?

Well, it says in 128, God blessed them and said to them, be fruitful and increase in number, fill the earth and subdue it and rule over everything.

[31 : 21] And then in chapter 2, verse 15, it says the Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and take care of it. So I want you to underline some words. Underline the word increase and fill.

Underline the word subdue and rule and underline the words work and take care. What is the image of God?

What is the human family meant to do with this garden he's put us in? Well, the essence of gardening is just to rearrange and reorder raw materials to bring forth new products for human flourishing and well-being.

And so that means that you are to participate with God as a steward and a sub creator to cultivate all the soil and all the seeds that are inherent potentialities in that garden of law and medicine, of family and education, of the arts and sciences, of finance and technology, of trade and commerce, of the market and the state.

We're to take all that there is in that garden and all of its potentiality and to unfold it and to cultivate it according to the way that God subdues and God rules his creation so that more and more of it will reflect the beauty of who God is.

[32 : 49] And you want to know what fascinates me about verse 15? Verse 15, those words work it and take care of it are mostly used in the priestly texts.

They're especially used to describe the responsibilities that the Levites, the priests have in the tabernacle in the temple of God. And if you go on and you study the Torah, you study the first five

books of the Bible, Genesis to Deuteronomy, you'll realize that a good deal of it is about what we're supposed to do in the tabernacle of God, in the temple of God.

It's this place where heaven and earth, the twin halves of God's good creation come together, they intersect and they overlap and it's where God's presence and his power dwells.

It's where his Shekinah glory resides. And the point is that that holy temple is meant to be a microcosm of the whole creation.

And that's why when it is constructed, it's constructed with the images of angels and the heavenly lights. It's constructed with palm trees and open flowers, with lilies, and pomegranates.

[34 : 00] And that when God takes his image-bearing human beings and he puts them in this garden temple as royal priests, and he uses this priestly language of take care of it and work it, what he's telling them is I want you to go out and I want you to turn all of creation into a holy temple.

Did you know that's why you exist? You exist to turn all of creation into a holy temple. Your home, your classroom, your office, your neighborhood, every place where you live and work and play, God wants you to make those into holy places that are filled with his presence and his power.

Strangely enough, Jesus comes along and he says, destroy this temple and now we'll raise it up again in three days.

Why is he talking about the temple? Because he's read his Bible. Because he's saying that the whole creation is summed up right here in me.

And that all of humanity has to find its new starting place right here in me, in this temple that's standing before you. And everything that God intended for human identity and for human work is being fulfilled in me.

[35 : 28] In my destroyed yet raised up body, I'm going to make this whole world into a temple of the living God. And Jesus intends to make your body into a temple.

He intends to make your marriage into a temple. He intends to make your family and your community, your workplace, into a temple. So that all of it's a place where heaven and earth can come and meet together in the presence and the power of God can be known and can dwell among us.

And now you know why the last two chapters of the Bible are written to mirror the first two chapters of the Bible. And I'll just close by quoting it.

Revelation 21 says, I did not see a temple in the city because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine in it for the glory of God gives it light and the Lamb is its lamp.

The nations will walk by its light and the kings of the earth will bring their splendor into it. The glory and honor of the nations be brought into it and only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life will enter in to it.

[36 : 45] So friends, let's join Jesus. Let's join the ultimate Adam in all that he's doing to turn the whole of created reality into a temple, into a place where we can finally worship and serve God as he made us to do.

In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, amen. Amen. Thank you.