

## THE TRINITY CREATING Genesis 1:1-3

[Introductory Note: As we study the book of Genesis, we will be looking at the priorities of the writer to show us 3 things: who God is, who we are, and what's coming in the rest of the Bible and [redemptive] history. *We will not be looking to solve the creation/evolution debate or argue length of days.* While we have opinions on those matters, they are secondary issues that will distract from what we need to know, namely who is Jesus according to Genesis.]

We learn two things from the first verse of the Bible. One, that God created the world in an intentional way, it was not an accident. And two, that He created it out of nothing. And we find out soon that we are made in God's image, which means that we're supposed to create, too.

Now, what does that mean? What are our acts of creating? Some of you have never thought of yourselves as creative, but I believe that each of us creates something in the context of, and out of, our life calling. Some are more obvious than others- artists in particular understand what it means to create, and maybe today's message will strike deepest with you if you're an artist.

But creating is not limited to painters, writers and musicians. Teachers create environments to nurture learners. Managers create teams and an atmosphere in which to work. Most companies create some new products and services, and hence, all of you who work for a company (even if you're step #37 in a 200-step process) are creating. There's even been a good bit written lately about hospitality as art- that as we create a stage for relationships to grow, we echo God.

There is a criticism of Christians out there, that we're not creative people. And you know what? There's some truth to that. If you look at much of the products that come out of the Christian sub-culture, what's truly creative? I used to be into playing a board game called 'Settlers of Catan.' Imagine my surprise, or un-surprise, when I went into a Christian bookstore and saw a game called 'Settlers of Canaan.'

I am convinced that the Church should be creating- not just fashioning new people changed by the Gospel, but actual art and music and literature. At one time in history, the Church was very involved in creating and some of our greatest artists were devout Christians working in the context of the believing community.

Let's look at three lessons we get from Genesis 1 on creating.

*We create from what God has made.*

God created from nothing. In fact the word for 'create' (*bara* in Hebrew) here is not used of anybody else except God- it means to 'to make from nothing.' God is that powerful that He can make things appear, literally, out of thin air. But we can only create from what's already there.

This is humbling. As author Harold Best once wrote, "[God] is the only One who deserves the title of Creator. We are merely creative. That is, we can only imagine and make something out of something else... This means that you are not to consider your work as much original as individual. Your work will always be 'out of' what you have somehow come across and 'into' what others will eventually come across. Thus, don't be afraid to borrow, but be sure you borrow the best and grow from the borrowing."

We're going to discuss the 'Creation Mandate' in a couple weeks, but I want you to see that it's tied to these verses. God gave a formless world form- so we shape the world. God filled an empty world- so we are to be productive. God organized oceans- so we do science and establish whole ecologies and intervene in nature when it's beneficial. So our work, both scientific and artistic, is to, as one writer put it, 'think God's thoughts after Him.' But the other part of this point that I want to make is that to create like God means to create in an earthy way. We create out of the common stuff of life. God didn't just create 'religious stuff'- He created hyenas. God didn't just create 'safe art'- He created sharks and tigers. So we also don't just create religious stuff or use safe stuff. We're free to use everything that's available. We're free to enjoy everything. Yes, the good gifts of God can be perverted, but we're still designed for good. That's why, after everything God created, He said, "It is good."

Hans Rookmaker once wrote, "[A]rt has its own task and meaning. There is no need to try to justify one's artistic activity by making works with a moralistic message, even if one is free to emphasize moral values. Nor is there any need to think one has to serve as a critic of culture, or always provide eye-openers to the non-artists, or teach, or evangelize, or do whatever lofty things one can think of. Art has done its task when it provides the neighbor with things of beauty, a joy forever. Art has direct ties with life... joy, the depth of our being human, just by being art, and therefore it needs no external justification."

In other words, a painting does not have to have 'John 3:16' scrawled in the corner for it to be Christian art. All of life is sacred, and the good artist rarely turns away his or her gaze.

### *We create in community.*

There's a misconception among Christians that the Old Testament tells us about God the Father (the strong, scary God) and the New Testament tells us about God the Son and Holy Spirit (the nicer version of God). Yet, nothing could be further from the truth. The Bible is a book about God- Father, Son, and Holy Spirit- throughout. And despite what we might be led to believe if we give a cursory glance at the Creed, Creation was not just accomplished by God the Father, but all three persons of the Trinity, working together to create all that is.

Where do we see the Trinity? The first is obvious: The Spirit of God was 'hovering over the face of the waters.' This is interesting- there's actually planned chaos here. But this makes sense, doesn't it? Those of you who have studied music know that dissonance is a necessary feature of great music, because it sets us up for the consonance and beauty of the resolution. This is something like what is happening here.

The second is not so obvious, but we do see the second person of the Trinity. How? In God's spoken word. God's Word is an agent of action- He simply speaks it and it creates. John 1 and Colossians 1 tell us that Word is Jesus. Jesus is the active agent in creation.

So we see that God is a community. And He said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness." And if you want to create like God, you'll create in community with others. This is very different from the modern notion of an artist- solitary, conflicted genius. Again, this takes humility to do- but the results are usually much better and we artists tend to stay much more normal.

In a previous life, I considered myself a part-time musician, but every time I tried to write a song it was never very good. Until I moved to Virginia, where I joined a 'songwriter's circle' - a place where we all brought songs to play for the group and got great feedback. The only good songs I've ever written came out of that period of time when I was creating in community. [By, the way, I'd love to get something like that started here in Stillwater if anybody's interested]

*We should create challenging art*

God created a complex world, therefore our art, although it can never be as complex as God, should be challenging. There is beauty in simplicity, but Christians should create hard art.

I remember a few years back Michael Card, a Christian songwriter, wrote a song about a time when he had gotten so depressed he'd contemplated suicide. The record company wouldn't let him release it. It was too morbid, wasn't happy enough.

**We should, of all people, be able to show the difference between what is and what should be.** Genesis 1 shows us what should be- beauty and joy. Genesis 3 shows us what is- a world filled with death and with people afraid to die. Our art should be able to balance and share those incredible insights.

There's a secret of this world that we know: that no good thing happens apart from death. Think about it- for a tree to grow, a seed must fall to the ground and die. For animals to live, they must kill other animals or plant life. For me to be a good husband, I have to 'die' to every other woman but my wife. For us to be good parents, we have to die to ourselves.

The hardest and greatest piece of art we have is the cross. That's where we meet the greatest tension between what is and what should be. That's where the Word of God spoke and was not answered. Do you realize that? That's the only time in history that God's Word, Jesus, spoke- "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me"- and nothing happened. He was allowed to die. The Trinity, somehow (it's a mystery) was not in perfect union. What was happening? The Creator was being killed so that you and I could be live. The Word went silent so that we could find our voices in the song of salvation.

Friends, we've all been made a part of the song of creation. That's why anyone can create, why you can learn truth from anyone, and why we're supposed to love everybody- because we're all made in His image. But, if you want to be a part of the song of salvation, you must see your story in Jesus' story. You have to take your messy life that you've tried to live by yourself and give it to Christ, so that He can breathe His Word into you and create new life in and through you.

Are you afraid of death? You don't need to be anymore. As George Herbert once said, "Death used to be an executioner, but now the Gospel has made him a gardener."

Some of the resources I used for this Genesis series were *Last Things First* by JV Fesko, *Creation and Blessing* by Allen Ross, *Genesis 1-4* by C. John Collins, *Genesis 1-11* by JM Boice, *Patriarchal Saints* by James B. Jordan, sermons by Tim Keller, Ricky Jones, and various other resources. For this sermon, specifically, I was influenced by a lecture I heard at the Trinity Arts Conference in June of 2005 on Creating hard art, the book *Scribbling in the Sand* by Michael Card, and Tim Keller's first sermon in his Genesis series. As always, the reader should assume that little, if any, of this is truly original.

