

Then I Made You

Genesis 1:27-29

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“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” Imagine reading the bible for the very first time. Imagine if this mystical and marvelous being known as God took you by the hand and guided you through the story of creation. “Come see what I made.” Oh, is it possible God was pleased with what he made? Is it possible that what God made was good? Maybe even very good? Oh yes, what God made is very good, and so imagine God taking your hand and guiding you through the majesty and the glory of God’s very good creation.

“In the beginning God created the heavens...” Once God took a discouraged and disconsolate man named Job and used the heavens as a proving ground for just how good God is. “Can you bind Pleiades? Can you lose the cords of Orion? Can you bring forth the constellations in the seasons or lead out the Bear with her cubs?” (Job 38:31,32) The stars tell of the handiwork of God. Poor old Job just wanted some answers as to why his life was so miserable. Instead God said, “Look what I made.” As Job nodded his head absently, picking at his boils and distracted by the painful sores that covered his broken-down body, God waxed eloquent. “Pleiades...the Greeks said that magnificent cluster of stars were the seven daughters of the Titan Atlas and the Oceanid Pleione. They were pursued by the hunter Orion until Zeus changed them into a cluster of stars...and over there, that dominant constellation is Ursa Major, the Great Bear...ah, don’t mis the Milky Way...oh, and there is the Big Dipper. Job, I made all these.” Job was absorbed in his own thoughts, but God waited, extolling the wonders of the universe, the billions of planets and stars and galaxies. Finally, eventually, probably even reluctantly, Job looked up. The sky is amazing, isn’t it? Breathtaking. Makes you feel kind of small, even insignificant. Wrapping the arm of a loving Father around the shoulder of Job, God said, “I made all this, every single star and planet and sun and moon, every galaxy and every solar system. I made them all. And Job, then I made you.”

“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth...” What God made in the distant galaxies is good, and so is what he made right here on terra firma, this bright and bustling planet we call earth, this planet earth we call our home. I wonder if a tiny little waterfall that has provided me a place of refuge from my earliest childhood days might have had a self-image problem. This earth is home to some stunning waterfalls, waterfalls not of a few feet but cataracts that cascade down massive cliffs spraying thousands of gallons of water that end in a churning pool. There are waterfalls in our world that you can scarcely take in, falls so awesome and huge and stunningly beautiful they literally take your breath away. I wonder if this little waterfall I have escaped to and formed so many memories with ever compared himself to Jog Falls in India, Sutherland Falls in New Zealand, Yosemite Falls, Niagara Falls, even Victoria Falls in Africa. This little waterfall is a mere spigot compared to the rushing waters of the famous and well-known falls. When this tiny waterfall was having a bad day, convinced the little drop of water he provided was less than a drop in the bucket, I can see God setting himself down and dangling his feet over the few feet of drop that make up this barely noticeable

waterfall. Then, in what might have felt like rubbing salt in the wound, God started up, “I made Niagara, I made Yosemite, I made Victoria, I made Jog Falls and Sutherland Falls. I made them all.” But our God does not rub salt into our wounds. Leaning in closer to the gurgling sounds generated by that seemingly insignificant splash of water, God said, “My little waterfall, home to a young boy who thinks you are the greatest gift ever given, I made all those famous falls, and then I made you. Now pay attention. Get ready. Here comes that little boy, and the day he spends with you today, at this favorite place he calls Bubble Pool, this is a day he will never forget. And it’s all because you are who you are, exactly the way I made you.”

What about the birds of the air? Recently we have witnessed cardinals, finches, orioles, and blue jays...red, yellow, orange, blue...bright and beautiful birds. What about the sparrow? God, you gave these other birds so much that catches the attention, colors and bills and sizes and shapes that make people gaze with a mesmerized fascination. I’m just a sparrow. I have light brown upperparts, pale underparts, and some darker streaks on the back. Where is my color? Where was your creativity when you made me? God patiently climbs up the trunk of a tree and slides his way out on a solid branch to where this discouraged sparrow sits sulking in his nest. Together they watch as a collection of winged wonders whirl before their sight. God knows them all. Ticking them off by name God displays a pride of craftsmanship. “I made these birds...I made them all. I made Wilson’s Bird-of-Paradise, the Red-necked Tanager, the Mandarin Duck and the Keel-billed Toucan, the Lilac Gouldian Finch, ah, the Common Kingfisher and the Red-bearded Bee-Eater, the Andean Cock-of-the-Rock and the Crimson Rosella...I made them all, each and every one.” Well, if God intended to lift the spirits of the sparrow, his mission was not accomplished. As each of these more fascinating, and definitely more colorful creatures of flight were named, the sparrow sunk deeper and deeper into a funk of failure. “I’m just a boring combination of light brown upperparts, pale underparts, and some dark streaks on my back.” God noticed the sadness of the sparrow. And God, who had gone out on a limb to spend some time with that sparrow, finally said, “I made all of these bright and beautiful birds. And then I made you. And if you listen carefully, my Son over there is giving a speech, talking about how precious each life is. You are about to get a shout out from one whom I dearly love.” And Jesus said, “Not one sparrow who falls to the ground...” escapes the notice of my Father in heaven. Hearing those words, hearing his name called out, hearing his name being given a shout out from the Son of God, that sulking sparrow puffed out his chest just a bit, knowing that even he, a lowly sparrow, had a special place in the kingdom of God.

A man came to God in prayer once. He looked at all that God had made, the heavens and the earth, things so awesome, things so amazing, things so obviously full of majesty and glory, this man looked at all that God had made and said, “What are we as human beings compared to all these incomparable things of beauty and splendor?” Maybe Genesis chapter one leads you to ask that same question. Day after day God’s power to create is on full display. Day after day the heavens and the earth burst forth with light, burst forth with life, burst forth with a language that brings praise and glory and honor and reverence to the one who created all things. What are we as humans in the scope of such a grand and glorious genesis?

Late in the evening on that sixth day, when so many other things had been made, so many things in the heavens and so many things on earth, things of which God could rightly say, “I made this, I made this, I made this...” late in the evening on that sixth day of creation, God said, “Let us make human beings, men and women, boys and girls, in our own image, in our own likeness.” Genesis one is God’s way of saying to us as little, tiny, seemingly insignificant human beings in a creation story that spans the universe, Genesis one is God’s way of saying to us, “Then I made you.”

Today I want to put my own twist on a moving story entitled “The Tale of Three Trees”, written by Angela Elwell Hunt. Imagine yourself there on the day God created you as a human being. God had made this and that, heavens and earth, sea and land, plants and animals...I made this, I made this, I made this. Now you are there with God. Motioning for you to follow, God leads you to a wooded area, to a small grove of trees. Remember God created this grove of trees, and so they could be any size and shape, with cones or leaves, fruit or buds, narrow and tall as they reach to the skies or strong and stable with the base of a Giant Sequoia that can have a diameter of 56 feet. But in this grove God directs your attention to three specific trees. They do not stand out from the others. Nothing about them makes them unique. I guess you could say they are non-descript. Nothing sets them apart.

But these are the three trees God wants you look at, so you follow until those trees rise right before you. One by one God describes these three trees. “I made this tree so that someday he could be cut down and crafted into a boat, a boat able to sail out on the sea. I made this tree so after it was made into a boat, a boat able to sail on the sea, that one day when you are out on sea of life, out on the water in this tree that has been made into a boat, when you are out on the sea, and the storm clouds gather, and the winds whip, and the waves roar, and you become frightened and full of fear, someone will come to you as you sit in this very boat. He will come walking to you, walking on the water. And he will say to you, “Take heart. It is I. Do not be afraid.”

Turning his attention to the second tree God continues, “And this tree will be cut down and made into something that hardly seems worth the bother. This tree will become a trough that animals come to for feeding. It might have straw. It might have hay. This trough will not be on display in a fancy house and certainly not set apart for viewing in a museum. This trough will really be nothing more than a lowly manger, a feeding trough for farm animals. But one dark night, a night filled with despair for a couple who desperately need a place to lodge, this manger will be home to the child the mother will bear in that stable in Bethlehem. Push through the door of the stable. Draw near to the manger. See the child, the baby child, the boy child. He will be named Jesus. And he will be called Immanuel. Through Jesus I will enter this world to be with you and to be for you and to love you and to never ever let you be alone.

The third tree was the least of all the trees, gnarled and twisted from top to bottom. But God slowed down when he came to this third tree. With emotion in his voice he said, "This one is only good for two things. Strong men will cut this tree down and make two rough pieces of wood. It will not take a craftsman to do what needs to be done with this tree. The two pieces of wood will be hammered together so that one piece stretches side to side and the other stands vertical. A couple of laborers will slam it into place on a barren hill, alongside two similar shaped objects. There will come a day when all the goodness I have poured into my creation will seem to turn bad, when evil will rise up and claim victory, when death will demand its due, and when this wooden shaped object, what will be known as a cross, will hold the body of Jesus, my Beloved Son. On this cross Jesus will suffer and die.

God stops speaking. All you can do is stare at these three trees. After a long silence God says, "I made these three trees. I made this first tree to be a boat so when the storms of life sweep over your life you will not be afraid. I made this second tree to be a manger so you would know I have come to be with you, that I was born into this world so you would never be alone. And I made this third tree so I could give my life for you. I made this third tree so you would know your sins are forgiven. I made this third tree to show that there will never be anything in all creation that can separate you from me, and me from you. I made this third tree so that you would know just how much I love. I made these three trees...and then I made you."

So on the off chance that there are days when you wonder about the meaning and purpose of life, days when you wonder if your life really matters, days when you wonder if anyone would notice if you had never been made, I just want to say this to you. The way I read this book, this book we call the bible, the way I read this book God's good work of creation was not finished until he did something he felt was very important. God's good work of creation was not finished until he made you. God looked at all this bright and beautiful, glorious and grand thing called creation, saying to the sun and moon and stars, to the oceans and mountains, rivers and streams, to the birds of the air, the cattle of the fields, the fish of the sea, to all his creatures great and small, "I made you, and I made you, and I made you..." And then before he finishes, before he can say his creation is complete, God comes to you and reaches out his hands. He cups your face in his hands. He draws your face close to his. He looks you in the eyes. He looks at you with kindness and compassion. He looks at you with love and affection. He looks at you with joy and gladness. Then God, the creator of the heavens and the earth, looking you right in the eye, God says, "I made all these things...then I made you." And when God saw all that he had made, he said, "It is very good."