

Text: Genesis 2:4-25

Title: A Four-Fold Relational Harmony

(Third in a series of sermons in Genesis 1-11: “The Story That Makes Sense of Our Stories)

A number of years ago, Father John Powell, a popular priest-psychologist, wrote a very helpful little book entitled, “Fully Human, Fully Alive”. He builds on the theological conviction first articulated by Irenaeus of the third century: “the glory of God is a human being fully alive.”

Powell makes the observation that: “True and free human living is based on three components, like the legs of a tripod: (they are) intrapersonal dynamics, interpersonal relationships, and a frame of reference.” (10) What Powell calls “frame of reference”, he later calls “vision of reality”; others use the terms, “world-view” or “narrative.” Powell continues:

“Through the eyes of our minds you and I look out at reality (ourselves, other people, life, the world, and God). However, we see these things differently. Your vision of reality is not mine, and conversely, mine is not yours. Both of our visions are limited and inadequate, but not to the same extent. We have both misinterpreted and distorted reality, but in different ways. We have each seen something of the available truth and beauty to which the other has been blind.” (10)

He got it right... did he not? That is how it is. Then Powell says:

“The main point is that it is the dimensions and clarity of this vision that determine the dimensions of our worlds and the quality of our lives. To the extent that we are blind or have distorted reality, our lives and our happiness have been diminished. Consequently, if we are to grow – there must first be a change in this basic vision.” (11)

The apostle Paul exhorts us in his letter to the Romans, “Do not be conformed to the world (or age) but be transformed by the renewing of your mind...” (12:12). Or as J.B. Phillips renders it: “Do not let the world around you squeeze you into its own mould, but let God remould your minds from within...” For it is the dimension and clarity of our vision that determine the dimension of our worlds and the quality of our lives. If we are to grow, there must be a change in the vision, a clarification and expansion of our perceptions of reality.

Which is why we are spending time on the Sunday morning in the Fall in Genesis 1-11. In these opening chapters of the Bible, we have “The *Story* that makes sense of our stories”. Every culture in every age has some kind of story to help it navigate human existence. Every culture in every age has come up with some kind of larger narrative to help it make sense of life on the planet. We simply cannot live without a compelling, clear and true vision of reality.

In Genesis 1-11 we see what and who we were created to be. In Genesis 1-11 we hear the life-giving news, the good news, the Gospel, that we did not “just happen”. The universe did not “just happen”, and we humans within it did not “just happen”. We were created! Someone wanted us to happen! Someone chose for us to happen! Someone needs us to happen!

And in that Someone's goodness, He then tells us a story... a story that puts things into perspective. A story that helps us understand the glory of being human, a story that helps us understand why we do not now have that glory. A story that helps us understand how the glory is recovered.

For it turns out that Genesis 1-11 takes us to the feet of Jesus Christ. Genesis 1-11 helps us understand why Jesus needed to come into the world and what Jesus comes to do.

It is the dimension and clarity of the vision that determine the dimension of our worlds and the quality of our lives. Thus, Genesis chapter 2.

There is no other story in all of literature – ancient, modern, post-modern – like the story told in Genesis 2. I wish the whole world would know this story! We would witness massive transformation on all levels of society. For here we are given an expansive picture of what it means to be “fully human, fully alive.”

Notice how the story is introduced: there is a shift in the phraseology, signaling a major change in perspective. Genesis 2, verse 4. “This is the account of the heavens and the earth when they were created, in the day that the LORD God made earth and heaven.” Did you hear the shift? Do you see the shift? From “heavens and the earth” to “earth and heaven.” “Heavens and the earth” is the perspective of Genesis 1, the perspective of the song before the story. “Earth and heaven” is the perspective of Genesis 2. “Heaven and earth”, Genesis 1, is the vision “from above,” so to speak. “Earth and heaven”, Genesis 2, is the vision “from below”, so to speak. Genesis 1 – God is “up” so to speak, sovereign over the work of creation. Genesis 2 – God is “down”, so to speak, intimately engaged in the work of creation. Genesis 1 – God creates simply by speaking from the throne. Genesis 2 – God creates by hands-on involvement on the ground.

Thus, in Genesis 2, we find the Living God being portrayed by God in bold anthropomorphisms. God portrays Himself in human forms. In Genesis 2, God is a potter, forming Adam out of the dust. God is a respiratory technician, breathing into Adam's nostrils. God is a gardener, planting trees that are good for food and pleasing to the eye. God is a farmer, a rancher, shaping animals in unimaginable diversity. God is an anesthesiologist, as David Atkinson observes, causing a deep sleep to fall upon Adam. God is the master plastic surgeon shaping out of the man's rib, a woman, the most exquisite of all His works!

“Heaven and earth”... Genesis 1... the song sung “from above”. “Earth and heaven”... Genesis 2... the story told “from below”.

Notice also the phrase, “this is the account of the heavens and the earth...” Literally, it is “these are the generations of...” The phrase is used ten times in the book of Genesis. “These are the generations of...”

- ❖ 2:4... heavens and earth
- ❖ 5:1... Adam
- ❖ 6:9... Noah
- ❖ 10:1... Shem, Ham, Japheth
- ❖ 11:10... Shem

- ❖ 11:27... Terah, father of Abraham
- ❖ 25:12... Ishmael, son of Abraham
- ❖ 25:19... Isaac, son of Abraham
- ❖ 36:1... Esau, son of Isaac (and 36:9)
- ❖ 37:2... Jacob, son of Isaac

“These are the generations of...” 10 times. *Toledoth*.

Now, here is why it is important to take note of the phrase. It is not simply a way of saying, “we are going on to another chapter.” Rather, it is a way of saying, “we are now going to take things a bit further.” Or, “here now in a is a fuller description of the story of...” (Atkinson). In lesson 2:4, “these are the generations of...” is a way of saying, as Sidney Greedanus puts it, “this is what happened to the universe after God created everything “very good”. (62)

Meaning that in Genesis 2 we have a story fleshed out of why God calls the creation, “very good”. In Genesis 2 we have a picto-graphic form what God means by “very good”. In particular, we have fleshed out for us what it means for humans to be created in the image of God. Genesis 1 – “Then God said, ‘Let Us make man, humankind, in Our image, according to Our likeness...’ (1:26), in Genesis 2 we see in almost child-like simplicity what it means to be a creature created in the image of the creator.

Last Sunday we saw how the words “image” and “likeness” speak of the glory of being human. To be created in the image of the creator is to be created to represent the creator in and to His creation! In the ancient Near East a king of emperor would conquer a new land and then set up an image or likeness of himself as a sign and symbol that he is now in charge. So we mere creatures are placed into the world into God’s garden are visible representations of an ordinarily invisible reality. We are created to represent the creator and his concerns in the created order!

And the words “image” and “likeness” speak of reflecting. We are created to reflect in ant to the world the nature and character of the creator. The rest of creation is to look at us and see something of Gods nature and character!

And what about God’s nature and character are we created to reflect? The capacity to create. The capacity to categorize. The capacity to conceptualize. The capacity to communicate. The capacity to care. The capacity to discern and to decide. Oh that we would live out those capacities to their fullest!

But, as we saw last Sunday what we were especially created to reflect is the relational nature of God.

“Let US make human-kind.”

“In Our image.”

“Created in Our likeness.”

The Creator of all things uses plural pronouns when speaking of Himself. The living God is the God that can refer to Himself as “us”, “our”, “we”! The living God is not a solitary monad. The living God is a community, a fellowship, a relationship. There is within the one God an I-Thou interaction and reciprocity.

Genesis is not explaining the Trinity; that God is Father, Son and Holy Spirit. But Genesis is opening the door to the process that finally led to the realization that we cannot say all that is meant by the word “God” until we say “Father, Son, and Holy Spirit” (James Stewart).

At the centre of all things is a relationship. And we were made by the relationship, for relationship, to live in the relationship.

Relationship: this is the most fundamental thing the scriptures tell us about being human. We were created for relationship.

And in Genesis 2 we have portrayed for us by the God who can say “us” the relationship for which He created us. In Genesis 2 we have fleshed-out for us the relationships that constitutive of being created in the image of the creator.

We discover we were made for four relationships: a relationship with the earth, a relationship with others, a relationship with the self, and a relationship with the living God.

Now as we walk through the Genesis 2 story we will both rejoice and grieve: for as we see what we were created to be we will all the more grieve over what we have become. And I trust we will freshly long for the original “right-related-ness” for which the relationship at the center of the universe called us into being.

Four relationships: earth, others, self, the living God.

1. The Earth

We were created for a relationship with the earth. Genesis 2:7 “And the Lord God formed man of dust from the ground.”

The story emphasizes this relationship by a play-on-words. The word for “man” is Adam. The word for “ground” is *adamah*. Adam-adamah. Adam is of the adamah. This play-on-words is in the English language also. Human. Humus. Humans are of the humus. Earthlings are of the earth.

What Genesis two tells us is that we are not human apart from our bodies. “Fully human, fully alive” is embodied existence. The best way to make the point: I do not “have a body.” I “am a body.” That is to say the problem with humanity is not the body. Oh, yes, our bodies do not work the way the were originally made to work; something has gone wrong; as we will learn in 3-11. But the problem with humanity is not the body. We cannot blame our trouble on the body.

We were made for a relationship with the earth. To be human is to be an embodied creature. I emphasize this because there has been, over the centuries, a tendency to ignore or even deny the fundamental materiality of our humanity. And it has led to two opposite non-human life-styles. One is asceticism, or legalism. This life-style says: “since I am not my body, I will deny it’s physical needs. I will deny the need for food, sex, exercise.” Yes, there is a place for fasting. Yes, there is a need in a fallen world to take care not to be driven by merely physical needs and drives. But I am my body. I cannot pretend otherwise.

The other non-human life-style is hedonism, or license. This life-style says: “since I am not my body I can do whatever I want with it. What I do with my body does not effect the real me. I can fill it with whatever I want, it does not affect me. I can give into any desire I want, it does not effect me.” So we see on the tv screen night after night the demise of body-soul existence with tragic consequences. As Lewis Smedes once said the man who visits the prostitute cannot leave his soul in the parking lot outside the hotel room. What I do with my body I do with me.

This is how Dietrich Bonhoeffer puts it: “From the earth man has his body. His body belongs to his essential being. Man’s body is not his prison, his shell, his exterior, but man himself” (Creation Temptation, 46).

And is not all of this affirmed in the rest of the story, in particular the gospel of Jesus Christ? For what does Christmas say about our bodies? God took one on! God became a fully embodied creature. “The word became flesh” (John 1:14). And one of the creeds of the church puts it: He “did not disdain the virgin’s womb.” Or as we read in Hebrews 2:14—“Since then the children share in the flesh and blood’ He himself likewise partook of the same.”

What does Easter say about our bodies? The incarnate Lord rose bodily! He did not shed bodily existence. Yes, He transformed it! But he rose in a body, ever to live in a body.

And what does the last chapter of the bible declare? Our destiny is not just “to go up to heaven,” to be ghostly beings. Our destiny is to go to “a new heaven and a new earth”. More accurately a new heaven and a new earth will descend to this earth. And we will be restored to a whole and holy bodily existence.

Whatever else you can say about the Christian vision of life, authentic Christian living is always lived in and congruent with the body. All the disciplines of spiritual life involve the body. Prayer, meditation, worship, study, singing and serving all involve the body (Dallas Willard). For I do not “have a body,” I “am a body.”

Second relationship: Others. We were also created for relationship with other creatures. Genesis 2:18 – “It is not good for the man to be alone.”

Genesis 1 – “It was good.” seven times “It was good.” and then “It was very good.” But here in Genesis 2, there is something “not good.” “It is not good for the man to be alone.” We were made for relationship with other creatures, especially other creatures created in the Creator’s image and likeness. This is why it is right to lament loneliness. “It is not good.” It is not good for us to be alone, for God is not alone! Us. “Let us make humans in our image.” Humanity in the image of God is co-humanity.

So, in one of the most tender speeches God makes in the story, God says – Genesis 2:18 “I will make him a helper suitable for him.”

God just brings to Adam all kinds of animals. God is not playing games with Adam. For there is a sense in which animals do alleviate the alone-ness of humans. To some degree. In bringing animals to Adam God is showing us this...and, I think, bless this fact. Our delight in our pets delights the Creator.

When God brings the animals to Adam, Adam began to give them names. And I can hear the song Bob Dylan composed:

Man gave names to all the animals
In the beginning, in the beginning
Man gave names to all the animals
In the beginning, long time ago.

He saw an animal that liked to growl
Big furry paws and he liked to howl
Great big furry back and furry hair
“Ah, think I’ll call it a bear.”

Man gave names to all the animals
In the beginning, in the beginning
Man gave names to all the animals
In the beginning, long time ago.

He saw an animal up on a hill
Chewing up so much grass until she was filled
He saw milk coming out but he didn’t know how
“Ah, think I’ll call it a cow”.

Man gave names to all the animals
In the beginning, in the beginning
Man gave names to all the animals
In the beginning, long time ago.

He saw an animal that liked to snort
Horns on his and they weren’t too short
It looked like there wasn’t nothing that he couldn’t pull
“Ah, think I’ll call it a bull”.

Man gave names to all the animals
In the beginning, in the beginning
Man gave names to all the animals
In the beginning, long time ago.

He saw an animal leaving a muddy trail
Real dirty face and a curly tail
He wasn’t too small and he wasn’t too big

“Ah, think I’ll call it a pig”.

Man gave names to all the animals
In the beginning, in the beginning
Man gave names to all the animals
In the beginning, long time ago.

Next animal that he did meet
Had wool on his back and hooves on his feet
Eating grass on a mountainside so steep
“Ah, think I’ll call it a sheep”.

Man gave names to all the animals
In the beginning, in the beginning
Man gave names to all the animals
In the beginning, long time ago.

He saw an animal as smooth as glass
Slithering his way through the grass
Saw him disappear by a tree near a lake...

Genesis chapter 3: In naming the animals Adam is exercising one of the capacities that reflect the nature and character of God. Adam is conceptualizing and compartmentalizing; he is begun to order his world. And, as David Atkinson says, “Man the scientist is not too far away” (69).

But...in the animals Adam does not find the promised helper “I will make him a helper suitable for him.”

Take careful note of the phrase “suitable for him”...”a helper suitable for him”. The phrase (*b + neged*) literally means “according to what is in front of,” or “corresponds to”, or “equal and adequate to” (BDB, 617). That is the helper who will alleviate the alone-ness has to be both like the man but different from the man. I like how Karl Barth unpacked the unpleasantness of the phrase. Barth said if the helper is only like Adam loneliness will not be alleviated because Adam would only see himself. But if the helper is only different than Adam loneliness would not be alleviated because the helper would not belong to Adam.

So God creates woman! She is the helper suitable for Adam...because she is both like him and yet different from him. In the female-human the male-human meets someone who is both like him and yet different from him. In the male-human the female-human meets someone who is both like her and yet different from her.

And take note of the word “helper,” “I will make him a suitable.” The word the text is using is *ezer*. It comes into play in names like Eliezer, meaning “God is helper.” In fact, in the rest of the Bible the word *ezer* is used only of God!! God is the great helper.

Now...get this. For it is crucial to see about the creation of the woman. Ladies, you are going to love this! *Ezer* means “one who comes to the aid of someone in need.” When it is used of God; God comes to us who are in need, in greater need. Kenneth Bailey who has spent his whole adult life studying and teaching the Bible in the Middle-East, says of the word “*ezer*”, it “does not refer to a lowly assistant to the boss, but rather refers to a powerful figure who comes to help or save someone who is in trouble and cannot manage alone.” Bailey continues “Women are placed by God on the human scene as the strong who come to help or save the weak (i.e. men).” How about that for dignity? Male-humans simply cannot make it without female humans. And history bears this out over and over.

The apostle Paul believes this. In 1 Corinthians 11:9 he writes, “...the man was not created for woman, but woman for man.” Woman for man. For. Not “in order for” man to do whatever he wants with women, but because. “For” means “because.” Woman was created because of man...because the man was alone and not able to yet be fully human...because the man needed an *ezer*, someone strong to help him in his helpless state.

So God put Adam to sleep. And took one of his ribs...and fashioned the rib into a woman. St. Augustine long ago observed that if God had wanted a helper inferior to Adam he would have created Eve out of Adam’s foot. Had God wanted a helper superior to Adam He would have created Eve out of Adam’s head. God wanted Adam to have a partner, so He created Eve out of Adam’s side. Or as Matthew Henry in the last century put it: Woman is “not made out of his (Adam’s) head to top him, nor out of his (Adam’s) feet to be trampled upon by him, but out of his side to be equal with him, under his arm to be protected, and near his heart to be loved.” (Commentary on the Whole Bible, 1961).

“Let us make humankind in our image according to our likeness.
And God created man in His image, in the image of God He created him,
Male and female, He created them.”

Adam is not yet fully human until Eve is created. Male-man is not yet fully human without female-man.

And this is brought out in a play on words. The word for male is ‘*ish*.’ The word for female is ‘*ishah*.’ ‘*Ish*’ is not yet human-in-the-image of God until ‘*ishah*’ is made.

Now, does this mean that we have to be married to be fully human? The text right after God presents the woman to the man, does speak of marriage “A man shall leave his father and his mother, cleave to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.” (2:24). But the text is not saying only the married are humanity in the image of God. It is simply saying that we cannot be fully human unless male and female live in co-humanity. We need one another in our lives. Which is what we see in Jesus – not married, yet fully human, because He had women in His life.

God brings the woman to Adam. And he says “Like dude...this is it!” Actually, “This is now bone of my bone, flesh of my flesh. She shall be called woman because this one was taken out of man.” The words are in poetic form, the first human speech is a love poem! “This is it” not only “this is the helper” but “this is humanity.” Now you have done it God!

Third Relationship: Self. We were created for a relationship with the self. Genesis 2:25: “And the man and his wife were naked and were not ashamed.” Does this mean we were originally created to live in a nudist colony? Not. “Naked and not ashamed” is the middle-eastern way of saying “I can be myself without masks.” I need not create a self to present to others. I can be who I am and not be ashamed. Wow! We were created to be able to look at ourselves – body, mind, heart, soul – and say “Oh what a work of beauty you are.” Can you imagine that? No need to cover-up, no need to hide, no shame, Oh Lord, can it be?

Which takes us to the fourth relationship: God. We were created for a relationship with God. The relationship without which none of the other relationships work. Genesis 2:7 – “Then the Lord God formed man of the dust of the round, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life.” Until the Creator breathes His breath into us, we are not yet fully human. We are only “candidates” (Helmut Thelicke) for humanity. We become human when the Creator breathes into us. It is when the Creator gives us mouth-to-mouth resuscitation that we come to life. It is when the Creator kisses us that we humanoids become “a living being” (2:7).

Two major implications emerge from the picture Genesis 2 sketches.

One is accountability. Since God shapes us, God has the right to determine the rules. God has the right to set the agenda. Here is the point of the trees...which we will grapple with next Sunday. God gets to tell us how to live the human life. Which means it is possible to come to the end of one’s life and hear “You missed the point, You lived by your own agenda and missed the point.” Accountability.

The other implication is Intimacy. God shapes Adam from the ground. The verb is the same used as a potter, who takes a hunk of clay, and carefully, tenderly, shapes a precious jar. And God breathes into Adam’s nostrils...touching lips to lips. A very intimate picture. Too intimate for some. Telling us that to be human is to share the life of Another. To be human is to be in-breathed by Another. To be human is to be indwelt by the life of Another. The four-fold relationship is what meant by *shalom*. It is what the Bible means when it uses the word “kingdom of God.” And it is why Jesus Christ comes into our world. He is all we were meant to be. He can make all four relationships work again. He is the Helper humanity has been waiting for. He makes us “fully human, fully alive.” Blessed be His name!