

**Oct. 3, 2021
Christ the Servant, Reston
Pentecost 19
Mark 10:2-16**

What is a “hairy nosed wombat” and why did God put it on the face of the good green earth? I can see the scene now: God has just created the heavens and the earth and all that is in between – the seas, stars, and skies. God has created the animals. Finally, God creates a human. According to the Genesis myth – a male. From the earth. Adam. From the Hebrew “Adamah” which means “from the earth.” God creates all this and then spends one great, long day resting and watching the Washington Football Team get beat.

But, on Monday morning, God is looking over his previous week’s work and says to himself, “Hmmmm. It is not good that the man should be alone. I will make him a helper as his partner.” Now, I bet you think this is the part where God creates Eve. It is not. Go back and read today’s Old Testament lesson. The man needs a helper so God brings forth the animals. He brings them, one by one, to Adam to see what Adam might call them.

Now, the way I imagine it, God started with man’s best friend. Adam patted it on his head and named it “dog.” Then the animal which considers herself above all other creatures, God named “cat.” Now, things were probably going fine with all the common and obvious animals, but as the day wore on there was not one which seemed to be a helpmeet for him and there still millions more animals to name. Maybe Adam was getting tired. Maybe he didn’t particularly like the one he named “the big eared bat” or the “fire bellied toad.” Maybe he was being facetious when he named one the “bat eared fox.” After all, these were kind of weird animals

and the purpose of this whole exercise was to find a helper. And maybe, just maybe, he had lost his patience altogether when God put before Adam the fuzzy little rodent with wings and Adam proclaimed it to be a “hairy-nosed wombat.” And still, Genesis tells us, there was not found for the man a helper, as a partner.

So, as the Genesis fable tells it, the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man; then he took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. And the rib that the Lord God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man.” Now, considering the day Adam had, he could just as easily have said, “Let’s call this one a small-eared, fair-featured homo sapien.” Instead, he proclaimed, “This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; this one shall be called “woman,” for out of man this one was taken.”

Bingo! The connection was made. Man. Woman. Husband. Wife. “Therefore,” Genesis says, “a man leaves his mother and clings to his wife, and they become one flesh.” Then Genesis has God give sort of a wedding sermon to the couple, telling them, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the face of the earth.” In today’s gospel, Jesus quotes Genesis twice in his prohibition against divorce. Jesus says, “...from the beginning of creation ‘God made them male and female.’ So, they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together let no one separate.”

Let’s pause here and catch our breath. I need to just pause and tell you that, between today’s Old Testament reading and Jesus’ harsh words about divorce, I can’t think of any other Sunday in our church year in which the readings cry out for interpretation.

Why? Because very few other parts of our Bible have been used to oppress and victimize people as much as these. If read as literal history, Genesis would seem to tell us that the only reason women were created was to help and serve men. It would seem to say that women's role it to have babies ("Be fruitful and multiply.") And, if you go on to read the part of Genesis left out of this morning's readings, God punishes the woman's sin by forever making a woman have pain in childbirth and being subservient to her husbands.

And so this text has been used down throughout the ages to subjugate and suppress women, assigning them secondary status, and subjecting them to domination and abuse. Furthermore, this text continues to be one of the main hammers used to beat down our brothers and sisters who don't fit so neatly into traditional "male" and "female" categories. Just last week I got, in the mail, a conservative Lutheran journal whose author went into a four-page rant because he had been asked to use the pronoun "they" for a fellow clergy person who wished not to be referred to as a "he" or "she." This author (Lutheran, mind you), used Genesis 1:27 as the match that lit his fuse: "So God created humankind in his image ... male and female he created them."

Experience, biology, science, and reason has shown us that, while heterosexuality may be the predominate sexual expression, it is not the only one. God also created them homosexual and bisexual and asexual and transgender and a host of other identities and expressions which I am continually becoming aware of.

So, when these readings present themselves, it becomes important to interpret. Genesis reflects a primitive world view which has evolved. The text has also been used, not only to oppress gay people, but to oppress the earth, the environment. The literal text says, "fill the earth, subdue it, and

have dominion over it.” When I hear the word “subdue” I picture something violent, like a policeman subduing a criminal. It connotes rough control. There are those who literally use this text to justify flattening out beautiful rolling countrysides with bulldozers to get at the coal underneath, or cutting down the rain forests, or filling the air with fluoro-carbons. It doesn’t matter what happens to the ozone layer because, after all, God said to subdue the earth. One wing-nut radio commentator recently said this, “God gave us the earth. We have dominion over the plants, the animals, the trees. God said, ‘The earth is yours.’ Take it. Rape it. It’s yours.” She. Actually. Said. That.

The word, “subdue”, can also mean “to bring order out of chaos.” This is a positive way to look at how we are to relate to the earth. We learn how to harvest wild seeds and plant them in an orderly way to produce food and feed hungry people. We take raw material and clothe the naked. We keep water pure so that we can give drink to the thirsty. These are the things God asks us to “subdue,” to bring order out of.

Is there good news in today’s lessons? Is there gospel? Well, focus on that part of Genesis where God looks over each day of creation and exclaims, “That’s good!” God created the earth, moon, and stars, and said, “That’s good!” Then God created the caretakers of all this – human beings – and was pleased.

God is the author of our being. And that is good news! God created you, me, and the hairy-nosed wombat. I’ve never seen one. I’m not sure I want to. But I am sure that God has entrusted that creature to my care. Let’s care for the earth and for one another.