

“Credo, Part Six: Creator of Earth”:
A Sermon for Trinity United Church (Nanaimo, B.C.)
for October 6th 2019 (17th after Pentecost/World Communion Sunday)
by Foster Freed

Psalm 104

One would suppose—or so it seems to me—suppose that the Creed’s attribution of the title “Creator” to the good God...the God it has affectionately characterized as “Father Almighty”...it would, at least at first blush, seem to me that the further attribution to this “good God” of the title “Creator”, ought to be the least controversial of the claims made by the Creed. After all: the world over, there are peoples and cultures—including North America’s “first-peoples” who—long before hearing the claims of the Gospel, have referred to God as Creator. Nor would observant Jews or faithful Muslims have any qualms...

...at least none with which I am familiar...

...that would cause them to hesitate about thinking of God as
“Creator”. Mind you!

In the modern era, claims about the Creator-God most certainly do occupy disputed territory given the suggestion—a suggestion often associated with the name Charles Darwin...

...the suggestion that there is no such person as the Creator-God for the simple reason that we no longer need that hypothesis, given all that we have come to know about evolution. That controversy has raged for the better part of the past 200 years...and it shows no signs of abating. To repeat what I tried to say a few years back, when preaching a whole slew of sermons on the first chapter of Genesis: I believe that science and religion both have truths to disclose about the world in which we live, that the discoveries of science do not negate the truths of religion, and that those who espouse those religious truths do a disservice to their faith, when they feel the need to debunk and discredit science. In short: I see nothing inappropriate—certainly nothing science has brought to the table that would make it inappropriate—for us, as Christian disciples—to name and to celebrate the Creator God. But here’s the thing I find fascinating when we take a walk further back into the history of the Christian movement.

You see: long before the 18th century, a different sort of concern was being expressed vis a vis the first article of the Creed: namely that God is Creator of Heaven and Earth or—as our own United Church Creed puts it—that God “has created and is creating”. One of the earliest teachings that caused controversy within the Church...a teaching that was eventually ruled out as heretical...is the teaching that the God who came to us in Jesus was **not** the Creator God...

...or, to turn that on its head: that the God responsible (more accurately the God who is to **blame**) for the act of creation “in the beginning” was not only a different god than the God who came to us in Christ, but was not truly a God at all, only a sad imitation of God: a counterfeit god, so to speak.ⁱ

And the challenge—the crisis—that interpretation sought to address, was the simple fact that life as we experience it in the created realm is far from perfect. That, of course, is an actuality we would be fools to deny; we too know that this flawed world we make our home most certainly is “red in tooth and claw”. We too realize that human beings are knee deep in violence, falsehood and evasion. And yes: as Christians we most certainly believe that Christ’s advent is God’s attempt at beginning the process of putting things right. The great division in the early church, however, was between those who saw Christ’s coming as the Creator God’s attempt at **restoring** the good creation, as opposed to the perspective of those who saw Christ’s coming as the True God’s attempt at rescuing us **from** the horrendous errors of the false-god who must bear full responsibility for everything that has gone wrong in the realm of a Creation that should never have happened in the first place!

And to be fair...to be perfectly fair...let’s have the decency to acknowledge that life can often be horrendous, and that science and technology has rendered most of our lives far more comfortable than even our grandparents—let alone earlier generations—would have been able to imagine. I kept hearing running through my psyche, this past week, fragments from one of the most beautiful Catholic prayers: one offered to the Virgin Mary in which worshippers are encouraged to regard themselves as “...poor banished children of Eve...sending forth their cries, mourning and weeping in this vale of tears...” Please. Let’s not be so blind as to dismiss such language as nothing more than pious bleating! Let’s acknowledge that our world—at times—most certainly can appear to be little more than “a vale of tears”. And therefore, let us acknowledge that the act of turning to God as **Creator**...the act of placing our faith, our trust...in the God who “has created and is creating”, and furthermore choosing to regard this God as “good” rather than as a malicious trickster, is an act that we most certainly could **not** undertake apart from faith! Make no mistake about it! To worship God as our Creator...no less than to worship Christ as our Saviour...no less than to worship the Spirit as our Constant Companion...is to embrace the way of faith.

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Yesterday early afternoon—in advance of finalizing this sermon—Sherry and I along with an assortment of children and grandchildren—spent an hour or so at the Corn Maze out near Yellow Point. It was certainly an appropriate place—resplendent with the earth’s bounty as well as a well-stocked supply of mud...

...it was certainly an appropriate place for a preacher—especially one who grew up in a city—to spend a bit of time just prior to tinkering with a sermon celebrating God not just as Creator...but as Creator of the earth in all of its nitty-gritty actuality. It’s so easy for us to play the critic where God’s work in creation is concerned; the Satan—

Satan—in the book of Job certainly seems to think that God fell down on the job in creating human beings. But surely what's true of humanity in all of its messiness is no less true of the surrounding created realm with all of its sights and sounds and yes, smells. Which may very well be the reason I found myself gravitating this past week to the realm of poetry: poetry with which to celebrate the created realm in its at times bewildering glory! And, of course, not just any poet...but for me none other than Walt Whitman: hardly a Christian in any sense of the word....he was recently (and I think aptly) described as a “born-again pagan”ⁱⁱ...and yet someone who had an unflinching knack for noticing the “ordinary miracles” that surround us in this created realm: if only we have eyes with which to see...and tongues with which to proclaim.

Why, who makes much of a miracle? Whitman asks. His response?

*As to me I know of nothing else but miracles.
Whether I walk the streets of Manhattan,
Or dart my sight over the roofs of houses toward the sky,
Or wade with naked feet along the beach just in the edge of the water,
Or stand under trees in the woods...
Or watch honey-bees busy around the hive of a summer forenoon,
Or animals feeding in the fields,
Or birds, or the wonderfulness of insects in the air,
Or the wonderfulness of the sundown, or of stars shining so quiet and bright,
Or the exquisite delicate thin curve of the new moon in spring,
These, with the rest, one and all, are to me miracles,
The whole referring, yet each distinct and in its place.
To me every hour of the light and dark is a miracle,
Every cubic inch of space is a miracle,
Every square yard of the surface of the earth is spread with the same,
Every foot of the interior swarms with the same.
To me the sea is a continual miracle,
The fishes that swim—the rocks—the motion of the waves—the ships with men
in them,
What stranger miracles are there?ⁱⁱⁱ*

And you know: while I, as a Christian pastor, might be tempted to answer that final question—what stranger miracles are there?—by bearing witness to Christ's birth and death and rising from the grave: what I hasten to add is simply this.

While we, as disciples, may well wish to affirm more than what Whitman—that born-again pagan—was able to affirm: God help us if we dare to affirm less. God help us if we find ourselves unable to celebrate the miracles that surround us, the ordinary miracles that attest to the unflagging and undying energies of the Creator God: Creator of heaven...but also, in all of its grit and all of its glory...Creator of Earth!

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Permit me a “coda”: a final thought related not only to this morning’s reflection, but to the five previous reflections—six sermons in all—that have been offered in response to the first paragraph...the compact first paragraph...of The Apostle’s Creed. It’s a paragraph...one sentence really...

“I believe in God, the Father Almighty, Creator of Heaven and Earth...”

...it’s a paragraph which clearly places Christians within the same tent occupied by pious Jews and Muslims: believers all, in the One God. And yet....unlike Judaism and Islam...even the ancient (and by Christian standards reasonably concise) Apostle’s Creed, goes on to say a great deal more. There can, you see, be no disputing the fact that Christians have dissected, debated and formulated their creedal affirmations with far more gusto and far more precision than either Judaism or Islam: a feature of the Church that can sometimes bewilder us and cause us in our United Church corner to recall that “how we live” is at least as important...

...many of us would echo Gretta Vosper’s insistence that “how we live” is far more important...^{iv}

...than what we believe. When push comes to shove, even an old-fashioned neo-Orthodox guy such as yours-truly, would have a hard time denying that. And yet!

Christians—for pretty much the entirety of our 2000 year history—find it impossible simply to “shut-up” once we have affirmed our faith in the goodness of the Father God, Creator of Heaven and Earth, for the simple reason that we believe that we have no alternative, in speaking of God, but to turn in the direction of a man named Jesus and furthermore, to turn in the direction of the Spirit we believe him to have unleashed 50 days after his death and rising. Indeed!

Even when we come together for so seemingly straightforward a practice as that of gathering around this table to share the fruits of the earth...

...even when we thereby affirm the essential goodness of the created-realm and the boundless goodness of its Creator...

...we do so mindful of the countless times—one final time in particular—when it was this Jesus who took the bread and lifted the cup. And when we claim—as we consistently have claimed—that this Jesus, at a bare minimum—came to us not only in the name of God, but himself radiant with the light and life and love of God....

Well: as Ricky might say to Lucy...when we Christians make such outlandish claims, we have some ‘splainin...to do.” And that’s why our Creed...which I hope we will get to further explore, further on down the line...that’s why **our** Creed cannot fall silent having named and celebrated and affirmed our faith in God the Source...but really has

no choice but to speak of God the Son...and then of God the Spirit. Doing so not arrogantly...not in a spirit of superiority, or so I fervently pray! Doing so, I hope, no longer with the need to issue anathemas and condemnations and refutations. But seeking—surely with awe and wonder and a large dollop of humility—to give an account of the hope within us, the hope that sustains us.^v

Hope that is ours in the Spirit! Hope that is ours in the name of the Son! And yes: hope that rests firmly in the goodness of the One we know as Creator: Creator of heaven **and** earth. There for us at our beginning. Promising to be there in the end!

May it be so! Thanks be to God!

ⁱ Those who wish to pursue this fascinating topic further may wish to consult:

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Demiurge>

ⁱⁱ <https://www.latimes.com/opinion/op-ed/la-oe-kronman-american-religion-20161222-story.html>

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://poets.org/poem/miracles>

^{iv} Subtitle of her book: *With or Without God*

^v Paraphrasing 1st Peter 3:15