

When you look at a forest there is a beauty that comes from the overview or the expanse; there is also a beauty that comes from one tree or even one square foot of ground. Today, as we look for the truth about God and us in this Second Creation story from Genesis, we will see both; looking at the zoomed-in and zoomed-out truth in the story. First, zoomed-in. Genesis 2:18 the creation of Eve or woman, which is outside today's reading but we need to talk about, says, "I will make a helper as *adam's* partner." When we think "helper" we think subordinate, something like the rank of prep cook—the lowest rung in kitchen staff hierarchy. But the Hebrew word we translate as "helper" is sometimes used to refer to God. An example is Psalm 70:5 "O God, I am poor and needy; come to me! You are my *helper* and my deliverer." In Genesis *helper* doesn't convey anything about hierarchical status, but instead points toward the need to fulfill a task. In Genesis the two humans are partners in serving the garden, the ground from which they came. Many sins against women have been committed mis-using this verse. We need to know and live out the truth of women's rights and equality.

Another tree or zoomed-in view: in Genesis 2:7 it says, "then the Lord God formed man from the dust of the ground..." in Hebrew, "God brought forth *adam* from the *adamah*. An English translation that gets at the word play might be humans from the humus. Our translations obscure the fundamental relationship between adam and adamah, humans and humus/soil. The translations also hides God's first commandment in the Bible—telling

humans to *abad* the soil. *Abad* gets translated as "till", "work", or "cultivate", but the Hebrew word *abad* finds its roots in the word for "worship" and this verse is better translated, that God put humans in the garden "to serve" or "to work for" the soil. In the text there is no suggestion of ruling over or even ownership of the earth—the work prescribed to humans is humble and necessary.

This year we are looking at water and vocation. Two topics that intersect with each other in many different ways on many different levels. God's command in Genesis to us is: serve the soil. Caring for the earth means caring for the water. Clean water and healthy land can't be separated. In some respects our first vocation, coming right after we were created, is to care for soil and water. Water is the earthly object in baptism, God's promise and calling are in, with, and under the water. The water bears Jesus' love to us in baptism. Baptism is the sacrament of vocation. The waters of Baptism connect us to Christ's love and God's mission in the world.

We've been zoomed-in I am going to use a story to zoom us out, to move us from the trees to the forest. Aylito's feet know the mountain. Even at four in the morning she can run down the rocks to the river by starlight alone and climb the steep mountain back up to her village with 50 pounds of water on her back. She has made this journey three times a day for nearly all of her 25 years. So has every other woman in her village, in Ethiopia. Aylito dropped out of school when she was eight years old, mostly because she

had to help her mother fetch water from the Toiro River. The water is dirty and unsafe to drink, but it is the only water the village has ever had. Aylito is one of the 1 in 9 people in the world that has no access to clean water. It is estimated that dirty water and the lack of a toilet and proper hygiene kills between 3-4 million people each year, many of those are children under the age of five. Aylito's trips to the river to fetch water consume eight hours of her day. Meaning she can't grow more food or start income-producing businesses, or go to school.

Clean, safe water is a real issue in our world and Peace Lutheran is part of the solution. Partnering with the ELCA we will raise awareness, walk and send money to provide clean water. This isn't the end of the story. Our efforts alone won't stop the deaths and create justice around water. But our story is part of a bigger story, part of Aylito's story, part of God's story.

With any story it is important to know where it takes place... is the scene a galaxy far far way or a village up the mountain from the Toiro River? Often the first thing a story does is set the scene. It gives you a frame of reference a way to interpret all that is happening. This is true with the Bible which starts... In the beginning. Not "a" beginning, "the" beginning. The very start of time. And the Bible has an ending... the very end of times. The book of Revelation draws a picture of the beauty God recreates as heaven comes to earth: a crystal clear river whose source is God, trees all over that bear fruit in every season. In fact

the Bible is told as one long story—beginning at the very beginning and ending at the very end. We are invited to understand our lives as part of this unfolding story of God and God's people. Stop and think about that—your, our story is part the Biblical story.

Brene Brown's research, some of which we read in her book *Daring Greatly* last Lent, shows people often feel like they are *not enough*. Henry David Thoreau said, "Most people lead lives of quiet desperation." Both of these address the age old questions of meaning and belonging—"Does my life matter?" When I say, "age old," I mean from the beginning of the ages. At the heart of what we call the fall isn't a fall but an upward rebellion. What the serpent does is create disbelief in self, getting them to believe they are not enough. The serpent says, "if you only get this, forbidden fruit, you will be like God, you will be enough." These are still the words of the serpent, "if only you were a better parent, made varsity or were thinner, then you would be enough." Listening to the serpent is an upward rebellion not a fall. It is the difference between being created in the image of God, versus attempting to be God.

Being created by God and in the image of God means we are enough. All of the Biblical story tells us, in the midst of our faults, we are *enough*. You matter to God and your life is part of God's mission. God has done it, created you, loved you, called you, placed inside of you strengths and gifts that this world needs, to become the creation God intends—this is our vocation—quenched with Jesus' life-giving water we are given the energy to go out into creation as co-creators with God. In Jesus, we are enough, so much so, it is so true that God partners with us, we are God's helper, God is our helper.

Henry David Thoreau said, "Most people lead lives of quiet desperation, and go to the grave with the song still in them." Jesus love us, we are named and claimed with no strings attached. Jesus love doesn't have a catch. The song that it is us is our vocation—we were created to sing. When God created us, God put particular gifts and strengths in us; we were created with a song to sing. Being Christian, being created, means we have a song to sing. In singing our song we are bringing about the world, the culture that God intends.

Why walk with a jug of water after worship? Because part of our song that God has placed in us to serve creation, to serve the soil, to serve other humans—when we do this we sing, we are filled with joy. I challenge you: sign up and be part of Peace's effort for clean water, walk or run or bike and as you do think about how you are enough, so much so

that God is partnering with you to bring about the culture of God here on earth.