

“What Difference Does It Make?”
Psalm 25:4-12; Genesis 18:17-19;
Ephesians 5:8-17; Matthew 6:24-34

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Pastor Norman Fowler
First Presbyterian Church of Moscow

As we come to the end of our series about creation, let's review what we have talked about. Where we started was with thinking about how “other” God is: God as creator. Then we moved from thinking about how different God is from creation, how other God is, how amazing and beyond us that God is, to begin to think about the nature of creation. We talked about how creation is like bounded chaos and how there's this dynamic nature to creation, to what God has given us, and that we get to live in it. God has given us a world in which what we do matters. The decisions we make, the ways we see things, make us part of that flow of history and all that happens. We talked about God being able to both be so other and to create creation that can pretty much move along for the most part without God. What it feels to me like that does is allow God to come in and come alongside, to come and be close and to encourage us, to speak into our lives, to be present with us and move us along.

Now, why that trajectory has been important for me is, you see, I've been a little puzzled through my life and I've been living, in a way, feeling like a piece of a puzzle that I don't quite understand. On one side there was God, and I knew God created everything. I have this high view of God as sovereign, as the one in charge, and yet I didn't quite understand how that fit together with my life. As I read scripture, it felt like God was encouraging me to make decisions, encouraging me to follow along, and yet oftentimes when I heard about God as sovereign it didn't seem to fit together.

On the other side of that was something we might call science, and it also seemed to be telling me that it had a lot of answers and that if it just knew what every particle within me was doing at any particular time, it could tell me exactly what I was doing. It could just build all those into one thing and just tell me. So again, it felt like that didn't fit with my life. Somehow it should have fit together, but it didn't feel like it fit until I began to think about God as wholly other.

One of the things that seems to happen so easily is that after you come to faith and you begin to become familiar with what faith is all about, over time God doesn't seem so different. In a way God can begin to feel familiar, and yet if we take a moment to think about who God really is, he's so incredibly different. Even in relationships between human beings, we get to know one another and we think we can almost end somebody else's sentence. Then something happens and we realize we don't know that person as well as we thought.

For me, thinking about God as wholly other was really important because then what it does is allow us to think about creation, to study it, to think about what it is as a gift from God. And it began to look to me like the pieces might fit together somehow. Indeed, as I thought about how wholly other God was, and that God as sovereign can create a world as God wanted to create it, and as I looked at a world that was full of a

randomness and yet a bounded nature, something that was both incredibly dynamic and yet had a certain structure to it that worked, it began to fit together for me. It began to make sense. God could be sovereign and give us a way of living in the world where God wasn't manipulating everything all the time, but speaking alongside and inviting us into life.

Now, I think God created things in a certain way so that it matters what we decide, and I want to talk more about that. But what about science? We live with it every day. We live with a way of understanding the world. Is there any way to fit these together or was it just something I was going to have to live in the tension with? What it felt like to me was that as I let God be other, I could really study what God created. And, I began to see that science began to realize that maybe everything didn't work from the bottom up, that sometimes there are systems where things that work may actually have downward causation. Systems like the human body have the ability to do things affecting the parts, and it began to work together for me. The pieces of the puzzle came together. I don't claim to have it all together, but those pieces began to feel like they came together because it allowed God to be the one who created it all, was sovereign, gave us something wonderful to live in and to work with. At the same time we seemed to be discovering that perhaps that is the way things work, that there is a way of thinking where there is some free will. There is a way that we are participating in the flow of history and we are part of what God has done.

So that's why I put this all together and wanted to talk about it. And the one other piece that I found really important about all this was that when I let God be totally other and make a creation that God wasn't manipulating all the time, it helped me see how God could really come in and be present. I could think about God as the one who comes in, and comes alongside, and who invites us into relationship. It fits so well with scripture. He comes in and talks with people all the way along, invites them.

If we have a choice, if there's a path and a road, one way tends to be better than the other. So if there's a choice, one way tends to be better than the other and there are times where that's hard to understand. One of the things I think God does in coming alongside us and speaking into our lives is helping us choose the better way. Isn't that kind of the history of God with God's people, always inviting them to make the better choice? Now, we know that oftentimes they don't make the better choice, and if you don't make the better choice and keep doing that, you end up going the wrong way. So there is a good way and a bad way.

In the beginning, one of the ways that it seems we're created is to think about or to learn by imitation, to learn because we see somebody else do something. Babies do this. In some ways, all teaching and learning is about seeing how somebody else is doing something—learning by imitation. One of the problems with this is that as we continue to learn from one another, that imitation, seeing what the other has and wanting to be able to do it, can turn into not only wanting to do what the other does, but have what the other has. You can think of the Cain and Abel story in this way. Cain and Abel both gave their offerings to God. Abel's was received; Cain's was not. Cain could have tried

to learn from Abel. What was it that Abel did that made his acceptable? Instead, Cain just got mad and jealous. That desire to have what Abel had led to the death of Abel. It's interesting because one of the translations of the New Testament word for *evil* is to simply *twist*. So if you take the way of imitating, the way of learning from another, and twist it a little bit into just wanting what the other has, kind of shortcutting the need to try to learn to do something on our own and to just take it, it becomes evil.

So as we think about what God does as God comes in alongside us, he comes and talks about being with Abraham. He says, "Should I talk to Abraham about what I'm about to do? Yes, I'm going to lead him in the way of righteousness." That's God's way. So what he's saying is that he's going to show Abraham the way. That's what it is about God coming near to us. He's going to show us the way, the better way.

Last week, I talked a little about a fellow from WSU who, when he realized that there probably was a creator, felt like he'd better find out who that creator was and more about that creator. When he went through the process, he began to realize that the creator had come close, encouraged us in our way. Indeed, there's a temptation, if you think of God as totally other, to make God distant. But not only has God come close, he's come into our lives. The whole idea of Jesus Christ is God coming into our lives. In recognizing that, we hear what God is saying to us. God comes in to speak, to encourage, to show God's love, and to encourage us to follow. To follow Christ, for example, is the key piece. God wants the best for us and he knows how the world is set up and invites us to live according to his will, because that's the way the world is set up to work.

For me, it all now fits together. I was holding some things in tension. I believe that God works in our lives, oftentimes by simply speaking into our lives. Certainly Christ comes, the promise of the Spirit, the encouragement we're given. So when we have decisions to make we know where to look and we can help one another as God has been at work among us speaking into our lives, into our world. We are invited to the better way because God is here speaking. Amen.

Gracious God, we are thankful that you are present with us. We don't always see all of the puzzle pieces. We don't always see how it all fits together, yet we recognize that through your work and by your grace, it does. You have given us a wonderful life, an incredible world, and you come and walk with us and in fact, invite us to follow you. You lead us into a better way through the abundant life and to life eternal. Thank you, Lord. Through Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.