

“The Created Order”
Genesis 2:4b-9; Proverbs 3:13-14, 18-20;
Proverbs 8:22-31; Matthew 7:24-29

October 9, 2016
Pastor Norman Fowler
First Presbyterian Church of Moscow

In the beginning...

Why do I end up starting at the beginning? When you're starting something, the beginning is a good place to start, but for me the idea that there is a beginning, that there is a starting point, that there are the foundations of the world, that there is a creation is an important piece to understanding today.

When we think about the world we live in, when we think about the ways it works and we wonder about how we are to live in it and what we do, oftentimes we think about the order it has. So we think about things like physical laws. It feels to me like those physical laws have been there from the beginning. But if we listen to what the scientists tell us, at the very beginning it was very small, and then it expanded quickly. It started very small. In the beginning, a force like gravity didn't matter at all. It was only afterwards in the context of things getting big and being shaped that a thing like gravity began to be important. But I believe those foundations were set at the beginning of the world. It just took time for the universe to get to the point where gravity was important.

What I'm thinking about is how there is order. There are ways that the world works. There is a shape to what the world does. Why do I go back to the beginning as I've been talking about wisdom? Well, we heard those scriptures today about how wisdom was there at the beginning. In fact, in a verse like Proverbs 13:19, “the Lord by wisdom founded the earth.”

Sometimes somebody will ask me, “Why in the world did you just do that? Why did you do what you did?” I'll come up with a reason, generally, or it will make me realize I do it by habit. There's a reason for what I do. It almost sounds like the reason God creates the way he does is wisdom. Or that in some way wisdom is the foundational piece, the principle behind creation.

As we think about the idea of creation, if there's a physical order, we also have come to the point where we recognize there are other kinds of order. There's physical order, there's ecological order, there's biological order, there's social order—I think there's an overall order to the world. I think that one of the things that learning about wisdom has suggested is that part of the order that God has given to the world is righteousness, justice, and equity. The foundations of the world are set in that way.

I think there's a contour of the world. When people begin to talk about gravity, they often will say it deforms space-time continuity. Sometimes they will take a plastic sheet with marbles on it, and when they push a finger on it and the marbles start rolling toward the place of deformation because that's kind of like gravity. There's a contour to the

way our world works and I think it goes way beyond the contour that gravity causes. The contours include the way God has shaped it for life.

As we get beyond the physical laws—they are difficult enough to understand—but then we get into things that deal with life, and I think those orders multiply in their difficulty of understanding because there's the interplay of living folks and things.

I think God is inviting us to remember and recognize that there is a contour to life. He's coming to help us see it, show it to us. It's what wisdom is about. It wants to help show us the contour of the world we live in. God shaped the world through wisdom. There's this invitation in scripture to say that wisdom is still there and we can know it or at least be in relationship to it, we can learn from it and understand and be led by it, there's a knowledge that I need.

I believe that the world has direction. You can't go back in time. It feels to me like it's one of those directions we can't get around. We are directed forward in time. But there are other directions when we get to choose which way we go. We come to a Y in a path and we decide which way we're going to go. There are differences and that's what I think God is about; inviting us to recognize that there are those differences. Do we show respect for one another?

I think there are generally two directions that we are to live our lives in. It's a general idea, but there's good and there's bad. Those are general directions in which we live our lives. God comes to teach us, to guide us into the direction that is good and not that which is bad. It's almost like God has put us here in this incredible adventure and said, "Your goal is to find the good way through this life and not go the bad way." So when he sends Jesus, and Jesus says, "I have come to give you life, and life abundantly," he's helping us find that good way. The wisdom of God.

And I believe that structure, that direction is built in to, it's been there from the foundations of the world. Wisdom is there to show us the way as Christ does, as well.

I think this is incredibly important because it feels like in our world today there is a sense that there is no direction; we're directionless and it's simply up to our feelings or to us to make up a direction and whatever direction we make up will be the direction that's good. I don't believe that. I believe there is an underlying direction that God has given to the world and we can decide whether we go the good direction or the bad direction.

When Jesus is teaching the people, he is teaching them about the good direction, inviting them on that path. If you've ever taken a hike up a mountain, you would think that it's always up. But my experience is that there are ups and downs along the way even if in the end you get to the top. I think he also acknowledges that in life—that there are ups and downs along the way. This adventure we're on, this choice, this idea of going in the right direction, of building an abundant life with one another is not without its struggle. Perhaps that's part of the interest of it.

When Jesus is telling the people, "If you listen to what I say," he doesn't say, "You'll have clear sailing the rest of your life." No, he says, "You'll have a mooring. You'll be moored to the rock and when the wind and the waves come you won't be swept away." This adventure through life has its wind and its waves. It has its moments of struggle, but we have the hope because we have the One who would guide us ever further in and further up, as C. S. Lewis put it once.

Maybe I'm preaching to the choir. Maybe you also believe that there is this rightness and guidance. But it feels in our world today that we are constantly bombarded by that which would tell us that it's simply whatever we want, there's really no thing outside of ourselves. Wisdom suggests differently. I think God suggests differently. Christ's coming to us and teaching us suggests differently, invites us to live into the contours of the good world God would give us, to move beyond and combat the destructive at times, to struggle with the wind and the waves.

I think the difficulty is that sometimes we're a little bit like these three guys who lived in this area that always had earthquakes. People began to live in caves because when they built anything on top of the ground, it just fell down. But these three guys decided they were tired of living in caves, so one built a stone house, one built a wood house, and one built a bamboo house. Sure enough, the earthquake came and the stone house was demolished, and so was the wood house. But the bamboo house stood because it was flexible. Sometimes when we begin to think about contours of life, we begin to think that we can make them into blueprints that are so solid, but when an earthquake comes we get torn up. The flexibility we have is the dependence and the hope we have in God rather than our own understanding of the way everything works. Then when the world seems to turn upside down, we still have that rock to hold onto and we have the flexibility to move forward together.

For me, this is incredibly important stuff. There is a good way and a bad way. There is a way God would lead us together. Following Christ is not only the hope of everlasting life; it's the hope of life, period. Amen.