

So here’s what may sound to you to be a rather odd sounding and far-fetched scenario...I was thinking this week about having amnesia – I really was! I thought – so what if I had temporary amnesia? – maybe from a bump on the head playing basketball (which is not really such a far-fetched scenario at all!)...so I have amnesia - I can’t remember anything – anyone – nothing about anything...but I am able to think and feel and have my brain function normally otherwise (although some might question my brain function as normal...)...and to give this amnesia scenario another twist yet – for some reason the medical staff decides I am to have no contact or conversation with anyone for awhile; they’ve told me my name, my age, but then I am just on my own for awhile – resting, recovering – but let’s say I have a window with a nice view outside. OK – so here’s the thing – if I could remember nothing, and just had to be, to feel, to think – to start all over, with myself, looking out the window – I am convinced that entirely on my own, that I would decide that I believe in God – in a Creator – in a Maker of me and all that is.

What do you think about that? Does that make sense to you? – does that sound ridiculous? Do you even know what I’m talking about or trying to get at? What I was trying to get a hold of in thinking up that amnesia scenario was to consider how remarkable it is to exist – how amazing it is simply to be; what I was trying to get at in myself and want to share with you is pondering the simple, sheer reality of anything existing at all. And it seems to me that if I had nothing but the reality of my existence to grapple with that I would come up with this truth: that there is a Creator – that there is a God; or as the truth has often been stated: that there is a God and it is not me! And the reason for coming up with that truth is that it seems both obvious and thoroughly logical to me that things have a beginning – that stuff doesn’t just exist, always or on its own, but that it must come from something and in fact from someone, from a creative act of will. I think that if left on my own to ponder simply the fact of my existence – and then I did talk with someone, and they said they did NOT believe in a Creator, well then I think I would wonder if they had

amnesia! It is entirely illogical and unreasonable to exist and not realize that existence had a beginning – and that for something to begin requires an action – a beginning that could only be purposeful.

‘In the Beginning’ that is how the Bible begins; ‘in the beginning God’ which is an interesting place to pause; ‘in the beginning God created’ and so the story of time and existence is told...’in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth...’. The book of Genesis is the first book in the Bible and chapter 1 obviously starts it, but that was not the first thing written that is in the Bible – the story of Creation in Genesis 1 came out of the life and story of the people of God, of Israel, the Jewish people – it came out of a community of faith in which people had experienced a relationship of God’s saving grace and God’s call to true life. Genesis 1 wasn’t the first thing written, but it was written out of the wisdom of a community that knew that the story of beginnings needed to be told. And the wisdom of that community of faith was able to make a bold statement that expresses the only story that could tell the obvious truth about creation and humanity: that the existence of form and life, that existence itself, is the result of Divine will, Divine Word, Divine purpose. It was a community that could tell the story that Creation itself was not Divine, rather Creation was a gift of the Divine; that could tell the story that Creation was not a battleground of the gods but the expression of a God who pronounced it “good.” Genesis 1 comes out of a community of faith that says that not only its existence, but all things come from the same truth: ‘in the beginning God’ ...’in the beginning God created’ - Creation from and in relationship to the Creator.

I was a philosophy major in college – and I know that if I submitted my amnesia scenario that I described to you and tried to claim it was as an iron-clad proof for the existence of God, it would not hold up to intense scrutiny – it’s not an airtight argument for faith in God that I am ready to submit for publication (although there are a lot of other details to it that I did think up in case you want to ask me more about it later...). But what it does do, and the way I think my simple scenario connects to the Creation story of

Genesis 1 with all its poetic beauty and theological depth, is that there is an ongoing, vital need both for the community and for the individual to stake some claim to not only the what of faith but the why of it – not only the practice of faith but the source of it – not only the leap of faith but also its grounding. The community of faith in ancient Israel, and people of faith throughout time, and we in our time have a need to touch on and be linked to beginnings – for creation and for life and for faith.

The thing about faith in God is that sometimes it gets a bad name – and sometimes it's the people of faith giving faith a bad name – and about that we can repent ourselves and challenge others. But sometimes the bad name is imposed on faith: faith is equated with wishful thinking, or idealized projections, or unrealistic dreams; faith is equated with a lack of knowledge, a rejection of science, a lack of openness, a deaf ear to questions. And the thing is, there are a lot of tough questions to ask of faith in God, to ask of God, to ask of biblical faith – how is it that God speaks to us...why does God speak differently in different times...how is God active now...why isn't God visible in ways that we or others would want...how do we make sense of certain events in our world and our lives...???

Lots of people have and continue to ask those questions throughout time and today – and I would hope we would have the faith (so to speak) to put our questions out there too. It seems to me that often faith has been equated with not asking questions, but that in fact the opposite true – and the most faithful people are the most honest about their questions.

So – faith can get a bad name – and faith brings up lots of questions – that is true; but it is important also to abide also in the utter sensibility of faith, starting with the truth of a Creator – and that is the story Genesis 1 speaks to us: 'in the beginning...' 'in the beginning God' ... 'in the beginning God created'. That's how the Bible writers speak the voice of faith to themselves and with the audacity to claim it for all things. Today, our scientists, physicists, astronomers, theorize that the universe is somewhere around 13.2 to 13.8 billion years old – give or take 10%, a billion or 2 years...! So in other words, modern science agrees with Genesis 1 – the universe had a beginning! – things haven't just

always been – they had a beginning. The 13-some billion years takes us back to what is commonly referred to as the big bang – one single point of all matter and the moment it blossoms into a universe – except physics can't quite get precisely back to the beginning moment. And of course, no scientist can explain the existence of existence itself – they're smart people – many of them are faith-full people. And smart people know what people of faith know – things don't just exist – they have a beginning. No top physicists say things have just always been – they have a beginning (and it wasn't us) – they sound just like people of faith.

Arguments for the existence of God are in general something that don't usually sit right with me – it all always seems a bit defensive or just odd (and I always think it must be bemusing to God). But it doesn't have to be defensive, or offensive either. There are lots of creation stories in cultures and religions throughout history, and there is a connection in all those creation stories to Genesis, even as we affirm the unique and essential truth of Genesis - a story of God and the beginning that expresses both what is true at the center of this community of faith and a story that is meant to bless all people with a truth that is life-giving: God the Creator, and creation is good.

As the story of Genesis 1 is told again and again, it arises out of our story as a community of faith just as it did in its first telling – and this is how we tell the story of God and creation today:

- our lives – life – existence...all the creation of God – a gift from God – and God has declared the purpose of creation in this way: “good”. Yes, GOOD – there is so much we know that is broken and bad, fractured and evil, difficult and unsure – but God bless it, it is good that God created – good is life's source, life seeks good and good is its destination; we live in relationship to the Creator who is good. And for us the story of creation needs to be told with each new day, each beginning, to affirm its goodness – the remarkable truth of a Creator: that is an amazing reality in which to abide – it is hope – it sustains us – it is life – it is good. The story of creation is to have this at the core of our being: the faith that God

made this world and it is good – and that for it to be otherwise defies not only logic but our very humanity. It is the story of creation that for us as a community has led us to the story of Jesus Christ...entirely sensible that the God who created, then come to Creation in this way – predictable? no – stunning? yes – but it is the mystery revealed that then resonates with perfect sense. It is the story of our community out of which new creation arises as well – baptism, communion, grace...life-giving, sustaining... ‘in the new beginning Jesus Christ’ ‘in the new beginning, Christ created...’ – and it is good.

Those of you who were here last Sunday – do you remember some of the Epiphany questions and wonderings that our 4th & 5th graders shared? They were wonderful – and one of the wonderings was: ‘who made God?’ – what a great question – and we could go into lots of nuanced answers to it of how God is the uncreated Creator – but what it points to is a wondering deep within the human being of how things begin for us and for all things. It’s important to start at the very beginning – amnesia or not, it’s the very best place to start: ‘in the beginning’ ‘in the beginning God’ ‘in the beginning God created’ and it is good. Amen.