

Bystanders or Standbys

Genesis 2:4-25

אָדָם – (pronounced “ah-dom”) adam

אִישׁ – “ish” (pronounced “eesh”) Man

אִשָּׁה – “ish-a” (pronounced “eesh-ah”) Woman

עֵזֶר – “ezer” (pronounced “ay-zer”) help meet

Crime scene investigators know that if all the witnesses of an event report exactly the same information – they’re lying. Human individuality, the uniqueness of individual perceptions and eye-witness, the unrepeatability of each person’s own experience, makes it impossible for any group of individuals to see and report an event with the exact same language and coherence. If each rendition becomes a simple repetition — something’s amiss.

The creation narratives of Genesis 1 and 2 should never be thought of as “Genesis 1 vs. Genesis 2.” Genesis 1 and Genesis 2 are both intended to convey as much truth and light as possible into the relationship between God’s creativity and our creaturely experience of creation. To discern the divine in our midst it takes more than one voice.

What makes Scripture such a vital, life-giving force in our lives is that it’s not a “mantra” of repetitious, unchanging, unvarying same-old-same-old series of words. Scripture lives because it tells a story.

It’s the greatest story ever told about our Creator’s amazing, glorious, unmerited engagement with creation, and the unique, loving relationship God established with His created ones known as “ish” (man) and “ishah” (woman).

Compared to Genesis 1, Genesis 2 is far less concerned with the order of creation and far more concerned with revealing the creation of something more than birds and trees and creatures that creep and swim. Genesis 2 is about the creation of relationships - between creatures and humans, between man and woman, between God and humanity.

In our reading for this morning, we have the first negative chord in the creation narratives — “It is not good for the man to be alone” (2:18). The God of the Universe, the God of all creation, identifies with this sad singularity that God had created the “alone-ness” of “adam.”

Long before the introduction of sin into the world, God - who had filled the void with light and life and color and clamor - identifies “alone-ness” as a “not good” state of being. A new type of creation must occur to rectify this situation. If this had been recorded in Genesis 1, we might have read that “on the eighth day, God created relationships.”

There are two kinds of relationships in this world. **The first kind of relationship is vertical** - where someone is up and someone is down. Face it, we all start out short. We all have to “look up” to others, literally.

Moms and Dads might take the time to roll around on the floor with baby, but basically the most important person in our babyhood is “up there.” Which is where children want to be. For the first year a baby struggles to stand up. The first request every crib-corralled kid learns to make of a parent, even before they can speak, is a plaintive upraised arms gesture, imploring someone to “pick me up!”

As children grow up parents diminish in stature and influence. But for most of us, we never quite “outgrow” that first vertical nature of our relationship with our parents. We always feel like we need to reach “up.”

As men and women of faith, as “ish” and “ishah,” there’s another vertical relationship we never outgrow. Both Genesis 1 and Genesis 2 make it perfectly clear that humans were part of the creative process initiated by the Creator, by the God of the universe.

There’s a creative, caring power that eternally stands above and beyond us.

That’s why the posture of prayer is on our knees. That’s why the way up to God is down on our knees - because praying on our knees reminds us of the indelibly vertical nature of our relationship with God. In prayer we momentarily, intentionally make ourselves small in order to remind ourselves of God’s greatness.

But relationships, even relationships with God, are not limited to the vertical. **The horizontal is the second kind of relationship.** And it’s the essence of the Genesis 2 creation story. When all the other dust-based creatures parade before “adam,” the first created person, none are found suitable to become his “ezer,” his “rescuer”.

Although these creatures were created by God, and although they too were created out of the dust of the earth, “adam” had been created superior to all other creation. There’s a hierarchy and a dominance of “adam” that negates any possibility of true “partnership,” or equality between “adam” and any other forms of life.

Something new was needed, and to create this new kind of being, God takes three unique steps.

First, God “put down” “adam,” into a horizontal deep, divinely-induced sleep.

Second, for the raw material God needed for this new kind of being God doesn’t go to the head or the feet. God goes right to heart of “adam” and removes a rib from “adam’s” mid-section, thus exposing “adam’s” heart to this new creation.

This enables God to create a new being who is neither higher nor lower than the original. This new being is “in front of,” or “in full view of,” a side-by-side being who can meet “adam” face-to-face.

Third, God created not just “woman.” God created a new kind of relationship between equals, where there is no “on top,” “up or down,” “winner or loser.” No “contest,” only “connection.”

In Genesis 2 the woman is created in such a way that she alone has the unique ability to stand before the man, face to face, and be in side-by-side relationship with him. It takes a human-to-human connection to take away loneliness. And when the woman is brought to the man by God there’s an immediate connection.

Here’s a revelation for men about all that male reticence and difficulty in showing emotions. It was there from the beginning. It was something we “ish-es” felt from day one.

When the first “ish” was introduced to the “ishah,” what does Adam do? He gushes with a flood of emotions. He says “This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh . . .” (v.23). Is “ish” excited, or what?

Ever since that moment true horizontal, equal, relationships have been easily identifiable by language. We talk. We talk back. We talk some more. We argue. We moan and complain. We cling and cry. We sing together. We sigh together. We test out new curse words on each other. We look at each other soundlessly, communicating

everything. These connections are the most imperative, important, precious, and precarious of all the connections we'll make.

The God of all creation has a vertical relationship with us. The God of our salvation has a horizontal relationship with us. Both of which are captured in the symbol of the cross with its 'vertical post and horizontal cross-bar. The God of Creation willingly became the God of the Incarnation. The God of the Incarnation became the God of conversation. The God of conversation became the God of confirmation.

We live on a round planet. One of the fun optical experiences that comes with that reality of roundness is that the horizon, the horizontal plane, goes on forever. On earth we never come to the end of the horizontal plane. There is always another sunrise; there is always another sunset just a bit further on beyond the curvature of creation.

All horizontal relationships have that infinite expandability. There is always one more connection you can make. After fifty years of marriage there's another quirk to be found, another fight to be fought, another heartstring to be strummed, another prayer to be prayed, another laugh to be shared.

Standing "face-to-face" and side-by-side, **a partner who delivers us from loneliness in this horizontal relationship is the final creative act of the Genesis 2 God.**

Partners with each other. Partners with God. Christians bring the vertical and the horizontal together. In fact, the measure of the height and depth of our verticals is the breadth of our horizontals. We show the depth of our understanding of God by the breadth of our undertakings for others. We're called to standby, not be a bystander.