

Gen 1:1 – 2:4a **“This is Good”** (06/19/2011)

- by Rev. Peter Dennebaum -

God's peace with you!

It is an honor for me to be with you today! And I am thankful for the opportunity to preach here in this wonderful church - to which I have so warm and enjoyable memories!

Very well I remember your installation here, Bob, and how our former Conference Minister and now national UCC president Geoffrey Black preached for us. And I remember the Metro Association Fall Meeting 2008, which was held here, how I left the train with my bike and realized that our Michael Caine just had been the whole time in the car next to me.

You, Bob, were one of the first people I met, when I came 5 years ago from Germany as first fruit of the partnership between the NY Conference and my former German regional church around Frankfurt and Wiesbaden. You should have sent me immediately back – because now your responsible that I bother since then American congregations with this German accent; And I can tell you: Even I roll meanwhile the R's like a world champion I still cannot deny my origin – hi Brigitte! You are not anymore alone☺

And finally we all can blame our Marcie Agee for all this – because when Michael asked me 5 years ago at my first Metro Association

Meeting to introduce myself I came afterwards to my pew spot, where Marcie, who was on my right, turned to me and did this prophecy, which I never forgot since then and which got proofed since then so right: “YOU will NOT go back! ...”

Bob, you will retire soon. In exactly four weeks. Not from your work life, but as pastor of this congregation. This will be a big cut in the life of this church. ... And for you, Bob. Leaving people you love is hard. It seems merciless and unfair. Relationships have been built – and then comes this break, which we call ‘retirement’. We know how many people fall then in a big hole. Thanks God you will become only a half- retiree and you will go on to help other people to find themselves. But nevertheless it will be hard to transition. For you and the church. When Geoffrey preached at your installation he said “When a church gets a new member” –and he meant you- “the church will never be the same!” When somebody leaves a church – and now I mean you too- the church also will be never the same.

Who else than you as the former chair of the OMS-Committee would know better than we all what this means: For the churches sake to keep some distance, so that in two years the church can be ready to call in a new pastor. So that then the NY Conference Minister again can come and say: “When a church gets a new member ...” and he or she will this time not mean you or me, but somebody else. I’ll will be gone then too. Like you. Our job is to serve. To serve God and this congregation on its journey of faith.

I ask myself, why our lectionary proposes for today as our sermon text the creation story from Genesis. Why at this first Sunday after Pentecost and why on Fathers Day. The people, who put the readings together, didn't know that you at United church in Rockville Centre will undergo again in its long tradition an important transition. But now this creation text is here for us in our situation – the Sunday after Pentecost, on Fathers Day and in the situation of transition.

So let us now dive into the text of the day. And let me start with saying how much I am already amazed about you: You are the first and only church I know who reads a scripture text together loud in unison. Usually I am the one introducing this kind of unison reading.

The reason why I back up this unison reading so much is that the theology of liberation re-introduced this method to us in the late 70s/early 80's as the expression of taking ownership of the text. Reading ourselves is different than only listening. Reading AND listening are active doings, but only reading does both.

Let us go back to the text of Genesis and let us see, if there is something, which speaks to us, if there is something where we can hear God still speaking to us.

1. B'reschit bara aelohim et haschamaim w'et ha-araw'etz
2. W'ha-araetz ha-je-tah to-hu-wa-bo-hu w'choschaech al-phi-nei te-hom w'ruach aelohim m'ra-chae-paet al-phi-nei ha-maim.

1. In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth,
2. the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, **while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters.**

With these two verses our Bible starts. You heard it now in Hebrew and English. I am not sure how it is in English, but in German the Hebrew word “to-hu-wa-bo-hu” has become the literally the synonym [sî-no-nim] for “chaos”.

We cannot underestimate the importance and relevance of this Creation story for Jews and Christians. No story has been so misinterpreted like this one. No story has until today through its misinterpretation such a fatal and catastrophic impacts than this one. But also: No story is so much key to our Hebrew-Christian heritage than this one. This to uncover this heritage and to help God still speaking again in our times is noble task of the United Church of Christ as flagship of progressive Christians.

We accept the mythology of the story – and differ there with already from many right-wing and Evangelical Christians, who still want to take everything literally. But while they are so kept in the past we can hear through in the mythology God speaking to us.

In the beginning the earth was formless void and dark. The wind of God swept over the waters, Here, already in verse 2, is the

connection to Pentecost. Last week you heard, how the wind changed the people. I will come back to it later.

Let me first repeat what how the creation story proceeded:

God created on six days out of seven days.

At the 1st Day God created LIGHT and made so a distinction possible between day and night (v. 3-5); the first time an evening and a morning happened; time was created.

At the 2nd Day God created a dome out the waters: The SKY was created.

The 3rd Day, in our workweek on Wednesday- God was especially creative: The first time with the EARTH not only new material was created, but real life: Dry land with vegetation to yield seeds & bear fruits (v. 9-13).

Thursday was for God important as vegetation needs for its growing a kind of regularity: Sun and moon got created (v. 14-19). Whoever knows a little bit about cosmology and astrology would even say: God created on Thursday therewith also sexes and the soul. The sun represents in astrology categories the male principle, existential will, life, light, self-confidence, heart and circulation, ego, power and courage. The moon on the other side represents the female principle, the psyche [seiki], feeling, sub consciousness, instinct, warmness of the mind and imagination.

This way the Friday gets prepared, when God created at the 5th Day FISHES & BIRDS. Now God can say in a sexual sense: “Be fruitful and multiply!” (v. 20-23).

On Saturday, the 6th Day, God was especially busy: Wild and farm animals got created AND humankind. All attempts to subordinate [sub-ordinate] women must fail as God is described here explicit in plural form. In verse 26 says God: “Let us make humankind our image!” The verb itself cannot be used as argument – in Hebrew it is a participle [pár-ticipi], but the word “imagine” has the suffix 1. Plural and is therewith very correctly translated – diversity is part of God’s nature.... very import for us as church, which wants to make a clear statement for diversity and equality here on Long Island.

Please allow me a last example how important a linguistic analysis of the original text can be for the right understanding and interpretation in our days.

It is now Sunday. The 7th Day. God blesses this day, because –I quote- “God rested from all the work that he had done in creation.”

Two remarks:

1. The translation God as “he” doesn’t seem to make much sense – the word “ruach” which is used in verse 2 for “wind” is the creating power of God and is: female! We should learn to speak about God more as “she” – maybe this helps to make our earth more peaceful and warmhearted.
2. How much we misinterpreted the creation story for justification of profit, greed and exploitation we can see in a single letter. Again the same sentence about Sunday, but this time with another accentuation and in the more appropriate female version: “God rested from all the work that she had done IN creation.” ... “In”, not “over” or “against” creation. The single Hebrew praefix “le”, which

is attached to the word “creation” describes a direction or movement to a specific goal. The best translation of this creation summery would be “God rested from all the work that she had done FOR creation.” ... This is pretty much the total opposite what we do since decades in this country and is in my knowledge the most radical criticism of capitalism I can imagine. I am willing to compete with any economist for the best translation of our Hebrew-Christian creation story, but with best will I cannot read here the allowance for greedy exploitation, but ONLY for a responsible dealing WITH and FOR creation.

God has trusted us with creation. We are in charge. But who reads carefully and doesn't only pick the words “subdue” and “dominion’ out of their contexts will understand that Hebrew-Christian thinking is from its birth story protecting, caring, responsible – is **RELATIONSHIP ORIENTED!**

And now I will say a sentence, where some of you might swallow: The radical freedom, we have built our country on, social and economically wise, cannot be justified with the bible. Exactly the opposite is the case. God gave us only the freedom to be good stewards to the earth and all creatures, not to exploit it merciless on costs of us all and our children.

God, whose female spirit created and creates since then day for day, moment for moment new life, calls today on Fathers Day BOTH genders for help. Only TOGETHER, only when Jewish and Christian

men and women bring their male and female parts together to the table a new peace will be possible – within us, within our society and with creation. We need the will, self-confidence, the heart and the courage of the male side in us. And we need the female principles of feeling, sub consciousness, instinct, mind warmth and imagination within us.

A last question remains open. Why the creation story at this First Sunday after Pentecost? The wind of Pentecost changed the people. It is the same wind with which God created. It is this female spirit of God in the beginning of the Bible, which makes in the end of the bible everybody speaking in other tongues. The ability to speak fluently in another tongue just like this ...[Finger schnipsen]... sounds for a non-native like me pretty attractive 😊. ... But the picture of not only understanding, but even talking in another language goes certainly much deeper. To speak in another language means to understand the code the other person thinks, feels and talks in. What happens on Pentecost is the expression of radical empathy and deepest relationship ability; cross-cultural and interreligious - and always faithful and humble in relationship to God and her creation.

Our freedom ends, where Gods call starts. When you see, where God blesses during her creation, you realize that the blessings are done, so to speak, Friday through Sunday: Friday and Saturday after she created sexual living beings: Fishes and birds, animals and humankind. A wonderful translation for this fruitful, life-giving, literally life-bursting call I find in Star Treck II, “The Wrath of Khan”. Mr. Spock

sacrifices himself for the Enterprise Crew, his casket gets shot onto the planet Genesis and in the following episode “The Search for Spock” Spock finds new life through recreation – the scriptwriter definitely had understood our Genesis book!

The final third blessing happens, when God blesses the Sunday as she rested here.

So what does get blessed?: Everything, which creates life for ALL - and the rest time afterwards. How would a society culturally, socially AND economically look like, which would focus on a life in dignity for all than a luxurious life for only a few -on our all costs? ... United Church of Rockville Centre, never have you been so important like today! You ARE a torch – especially so close to NYC!

Let me wrap it up. You, Bob, are now in transition. God, who is a God of relationship, blesses the relationships, which have grown over the years between you and these people. Church – celebrate in the four weeks to come Bob and his ministry to you and with you. Celebrate in the spirit God has blessed us with when she created the principle of life. Celebrate – you have the right to do it – it is God, who invites you! See and acknowledge: All this is good!

AMEN.