

**Before the Stars**  
Oak Grove Presbyterian Church  
Rev. Dr. Anne Fisher  
December 13, 2020  
Genesis 1:1–4, 14–18  
John 1:1–5

In the moments when we find ourselves sitting outside looking up at the night sky, we can't help but wonder about the vastness of the universe. It is difficult to wrap our minds around it. Neils Bohr, a Danish physicist who was a major contributor to quantum physics and nuclear fission, all of which is beyond my scope of knowledge, said the universe is “not only stranger than we think, but stranger than we can think.”<sup>1</sup> What was there before the stars? How did our world begin? The best scientific and theological minds as well as the most poignant writers and poets have tried throughout time to capture our beginnings. Today, drawing from both our scriptures and from the poetry of James Weldon Johnson, let us move beyond our reason into the greatness of the beyond. Let us follow the stars through the words and poetry of the creation story.

Our bible starts, “In the beginning, God.” This phrase has been parsed, examined, questioned, dismissed, approached from every angle. Before time existed, before matter existed, before everything was put into motion, “In the beginning, God.” As people of the Book, it is our statement of faith. Let us start in the beginning Genesis 1.

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<sup>1</sup>Richard Rohr *Shape of God; Deepening the Mystery of the Trinity*

## Genesis 1:1–4

In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, 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.

Then God said, “Let there be light”; and there was light. And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness.

This is the Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

Darkness covers the face of the earth. What is it like with no light at all? I remember as a young girl, travelling with my family on the back roads to our summer place in Maine on a moonless night. My brother, who was driving, remarked how dark it was, and then switched off the headlights for just a moment to prove his point. We were in a place too far from any city that would shed ambient light. Even the stars that were numerous could not overcome the pitch dark of the deep Maine woods. We, his younger sisters, would squeal with a mixture of fear and delight, but we knew the lights of the car would come back on and once again the image of the road and our direction would be firmly secure. How frightening it would be if there were no of assurance of light. Darkness covering the face of the deep.

“As far as the eye of God could see, darkness covers everything, blacker than a hundred midnights down in a cypress swamp.”<sup>2</sup>

The stage is set; our story is just beginning.

“Then God smiled, and the light broke, and darkness rolled up on one side. And light stood shining on the others, and God said: that is good.”<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> “Creation by James Weldon Johnson from *God’s Trombones*, 1927.

<sup>3</sup> IBID.

God brings the light into the void. God brings light and the chaos is abated. Now time can be measured because of the light. The sun rises and continues across the dome of the sky and then sets with darkness returning.

Imagine in the days before artificial light how frightening the darkness could be? Imagine the time before fires when the sun set in the west it was best to stay hidden because in the darkness we would be faced with the unknown.

The creation story in Genesis continues 14<sup>th</sup> verse.

### **Genesis 1:14–19**

And God said, “Let there be lights in the dome of the sky to separate the day from the night; and let them be for signs and for seasons and for days and years, and let them be lights in the dome of the sky to give light upon the earth.” And it was so. God made the two great lights—the greater light to rule the day and the lesser light to rule the night—and the stars. God set them in the dome of the sky to give light upon the earth, to rule over the day and over the night, and to separate the light from the darkness. And God saw that it was good. And there was evening and there was morning, the fourth day.

This is the Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

We are not abandoned once the sun sets, the sky does not return to a vast void of nothingness. In the darkness when the sun is no longer above us there is light in the night sky.

“Then God reached out and took the light in his hands, and God rolled the light around in his hands, until God made the sun, and God set that sun a-blazing in the heavens. And the light that was left from making the sun God gathered it up in a shining ball and flung it against the darkness, Spangling the night with the moon and stars. Then down between the

darkness and the light God hurled the world, and God said, “That's good!”<sup>4</sup>

Spangling the night with moon and stars. The stars that pulse out their own energy. The stars that come from such a long distance to light our sky. They show us at a very basic sense that we are not alone, that there is order in the darkness, and there is light that even shines.

God's story of creation continues in Genesis and in James Weldon Johnson's poem. As light brings life to the planet. Light shines forth in all the colors. Grass and leaves and flowers of every kind burst forth. All coming from the light. The richness and the beauty of it all reveals itself over and over again.

In the beginning God, and it is God who brings forth a myriad of color and a cacophony of sound. Life in all its forms comes forth from the life giving light. Our story continues for God is not done, there is more creation

“And God looked around on all that God had made. God looked at the sun, and God looked at the moon, and God looked at the little stars; God looked on God's own world with all its living things, And God said: I'm lonely still.”<sup>5</sup>

Creation begins in light but does not end there. God is not finished.

“Then God sat down –

On the side of a hill where God could think;

By a deep, wide river God sat down; With God's head in God's hands,

God thought and thought,

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<sup>4</sup> IBID.

<sup>5</sup> IBID.

Till God thought: I'll make me a human!  
Up from the bed of the river God scooped the clay;  
And by the bank of the river, God kneeled down;  
And there the great God Almighty Who lit the sun and fixed it in the sky,  
Who flung the stars to the most far corner of the night;  
Who rounded the earth in the middle of God's hand;  
This Great God, like a mammy bending over her baby,  
Kneeled down in the dust toiling over a lump of clay  
Till God shaped it in God's own image;  
Then into it God blew the breath of life, and we became a living soul.  
Amen. Amen.”<sup>6</sup>

We, with all our glory and foibles. We who cause great joy and consternation. We humans are created. Why would God do this? Why would God create us with the potential to sing with the angels as well as or fall into the depths of dark depravity? Our story becomes fuller in the Gospel according to John. Listen to John's beginning of the Gospel, John's statement of faith:

### **John 1:1–4**

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him, not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people.

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<sup>6</sup> IBID.

This is the Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

In the beginning when all was nothing, was the Word. The Word was with God and now John is proclaiming that the Word is being brought forth into the world. That is our Christmas proclamation. Through the Word is Jesus Christ, God with us.

What motivates God do all of this, in such grand scheme of things and in such intricate detail? There is only one word to explain it. Love. Out of love God creates the heavens and the earth. Out of love, come the birds of the air and the fish in the sea. For love of the world, God brought God's son born into the world in the same manner we are brought into the world. It is love.

At a church retreat long ago, we had an astrophysicist who was a keynote speaker on the subject of creation. He told us that the meteors that enter the earth from the heavens contain iron. These meteors are where we can trace our iron on this planet including the iron that is found in our blood. In other words, every living creature that has blood pulsing through their veins comes from the stars; we are made up of stardust. God's creation is not linear but comes full circle. From the stars in the heavens to the birthing cry of each baby, we are tied together and what bounds us into this intricate mind-boggling mystery of creation is a love that knows no bounds. As we gaze upon the heavens think about our creator and the love God has for us. We are God's beloved children. Thanks be to God. Amen. And Amen.