

Created for Relationships  
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There's a great story I've shared before about a man caught in a flood. He had to escape to the roof of his house and he's sitting up there waiting to be rescued. He starts praying, "Please God, save me. Rescue me from this flood." And then all of a sudden, a neighbor in a canoe floats by and offers to help, but the man turns the neighbor down, "Not to worry, God will save me." Later on, with the water rising more, the police come in a boat and offer to help the man. He turns them down too, saying, "I'm perfectly fine up here on my dry roof, go rescue others in need. God will save me." Finally, a helicopter appears and the pilot announces that he needs to airlift the man to safety or he will die. The man says, "No thank you. God will save me."

Unfortunately the man drowns, and appears before God in heaven. The man starts ranting, "I've been a good Christian my whole life and I was praying during that flood for you to save me. And you let me die—why God? Why would you do that to me?" God, in exasperation, says to him, "Look, I sent your neighbor in a canoe, the police in a boat, and a helicopter crew to airlift you to safety. What more could I have done to save you?"

We often have these preconceived notions for how we think God works. But God is often full of surprises, working in ways we don't comprehend until much later. In our creation story in Genesis Chapter 1, we see the creativity of God---the way God molds and shapes the waters, earth, sun, moon, stars, plants, animals, people, and the Sabbath. It's safe to say that we can take today's story on a metaphorical level. Not asking us to maintain that God created the heavens and earth in six twenty-four hour time periods or anything. Therefore, the earth is tops only 10,000 years old. No, our creation story is so much more interesting on a metaphorical level anyway.

My Hebrew Bible Professor always said that creation is a dance between order and chaos. Everything is separated according to its type because ancient peoples had a real longing for order. And there was evening and there was morning the first day, the second day, and so on. God separated the light from the dark, the waters above from the waters below, the earth from the sea, and the sea creatures from the sky creatures from the earth creatures. Animals and human beings are both created on the sixth day and God uses the seventh day to rest—creation exists for the Sabbath. The story is about order and chaos and God as love. "And God saw that it was good."

But just because we may not take today's scriptural account of creation literally does not mean we should scrap the whole thing. Because this story is still true whether it happened exactly as written or not. Most cultures have creation stories that tend to be big stories we can carry around our whole lives. Our Judeo-Christian story shows us that God is love and God created the world out of love.

In antiquity, we can contrast the Genesis creation story with the Enuma Elish, the Babylonian creation story. Some have claimed that Genesis, possibly written during the Babylonian Exile, was a way that the Hebrew people rebelled against their Babylonian captors. In the Enuma Elish, the Babylonian pantheon of gods kills each other in an epic battle and humanity is created out of the blood of one of the gods. It's a violent and bloody and disturbing account of creation.

Creation stories tell us about the people who were trying to understand how they came to be and divinity itself. The Babylonians relished in war and conquering their neighbors—the Enuma

Elish reflects their culture. On the other hand, creation in Genesis 1 is about making something beautiful out of chaos, the need for order, and God creating out of love and a yearning for relationship which reflected the Hebrew culture.

So now that we've explored the story itself a bit and how creation stories can be reflective of cultures, we can get into more contemporary explorations and figure out how Genesis speaks to us today. This story is so good, it has inspired others to ask questions about humanity--did God create out of cosmic loneliness and does God need us too?

One contemporary creation story is Phyllis Root's *Big Momma Makes the World* which uses feminine imagery for God and even features the Big Bang. In this work, Big Momma is with all the animals and her baby at one point. She says, "I'm lonely . . . Who's gonna sit on the front porch and swap stories with me? I need some folks to keep me company." So Big Momma made people, "and that's how the sixth day went by, with Big Momma and all those folks sitting on the porch and gabbing while the sun went down."

What I find fascinating in all creation accounts is how humanity is birthed. In the Genesis 1 text, God decides to create humanity in our image—that's plural in Hebrew and then the text switches back to Elohim which is a masculine word for God. Christian scholars sometimes say—hello, this can point to the Trinity! God creates male and female in God's image which means that God is far more complicated than our human minds can conceive and God is at God's core a relational being. God is Creator, Sustainer, Redeemer/Creator, Christ, Holy Spirit/Father or Mother, Son, Holy Ghost/Love, Lover, Beloved after all. How great to use expansive language for God!

Another retelling of the creation story is by James Weldon Johnson, who penned "The Creation" in 1927. Johnson uses exclusively male gendered language for God and humanity, as was common in the 1920s, obviously. And I love the way he imagined the birth of people. He wrote, "When God walked around, and God looked around on all that he had made. He looked at his sun, and he looked at his moon, and he looked at his little stars; He looked on his world with all its living things, and God said: I'm lonely still. Then God sat down—on the side of a hill where he could think; by a deep, wide river he sat down; with his head in his hands, God thought and thought, till he thought: I'll make me a man!"

According to Johnson, who likely inspired Phyllis Root, God creates humanity out of God's own loneliness and longing for relationship. The implications of these more modern depictions of creation are important--maybe God really does need us.

So why does the creation story matter today and how can we use it to make meaning in our lives? Well, if God is love and was lonely and longed for relationship and God created us to fill the void, then God must feel heartbroken about what we human beings sometimes do to one another. All these school shootings in particular are just horrific. The latest happened at Reynolds High School in Troutdale, Oregon on Tuesday and left one student dead, one teacher injured, and the shooter himself died. In a statement soon after, President Obama said that we need to do some soul searching as a country, relating, "My biggest frustration so far is the fact that this society has not been willing to take some basic steps to keep guns out of the hands of people who can do just unbelievable damage . . . We're the only developed country on earth where this happens."

When we hear about school shootings over and over again we can start to become numb and desensitized. We may even start to believe that this is just how it is; this is just the world we live in today. Even beyond school shootings, a Catholic priest died and another was injured on Thursday in Arizona by someone who entered the church and attacked. What's happening here? There have been seventy-four incidents of gun violence at or around schools and

colleges in our country since Newtown in 2012. On average, we now have one school shooting every five weeks. It's no wonder that we may feel helpless about what we can do to stop this gun violence, and our president is asking us as a nation to do some soul-searching.

For Christians, we can use our creation story to help us search our souls. Remember it was originally written to counter a depiction of divinity and humanity as violent. Our story is a story of love, love beyond anything we can imagine. If we are created in the image of God, a God who is love, and we are holy and blessed and made for relationship with God and one another, then we can easily stand up for human dignity and respect. It's just what we should do as Christians knowing that all people are made in God's very image. And we can teach our children and youth to value every human life because life itself is a gift from God. "God saw everything that God had made, and indeed, it was very good."

In the end, if we operate like that man waiting for God in some miraculous other-worldly move to rescue him from that flood, then we are going to wait a good, long time. God gave us free will and the ability to choose the ways of life or the ways of death. God can't always just take care of this chaos anymore, this chaos of our making. No, God does what God can—sends us people to help even, but we are charged by God with being the stewards of the earth and caring deeply for each other.

When Big Momma was done with creation, She lined up all those folks She had just made. She said, "This is a real nice world we got here, and you all better take some good care of it. I'm taking a day off to rest now, but I'll be keeping an eye on you." This is a real nice world we have here. And we can take care of our world and each other. May it be so with us, Amen