

Created in the Shadows

First Sunday of the Pentecost

Liturgical Year A
June 4, 2023

Seeds of Faith
Genesis 1:1-2

During the time of my conception and birth the world was in chaos. WW II was in full swing in Europe and the mood in the United States was very tense. The fear was how soon it would be before we were drawn into the war. On the day I was born, March 30, 1941 all German, Italian, and Danish ships anchored in the United States waters were taken into protective curfew.

Our isolation from the war ended on December 7, 1941 when Japan bombed Pearl Harbor. My father, Jerry Siebert, on December 6, 1943 volunteered for the war, he was sworn in on December 18, was called up on April 4, 1944 and was assigned to the U.S. ship Yosemite.

Yosemite was a Dixie-class destroyer which repaired and serviced over 200 ships. Dad, along with a crew of 1000 placed wrecked ships back into action. One could easily say I was created in the shadows of chaos and war.

Our first chapter in Genesis is written in the simplest of words, yet contains very important, though also very obscure, misunderstood matters. According to Saint Jerome, it was forbidden for anyone among the Jews to read or explain it to others before he had reached the age of thirty years.

In getting a better handle on our scripture I am relying on three Biblical giants: Gerhard von Rad, Walter Brueggemann and Kathleen M O'Connor. When I place all their ideas in a row these are my findings.

The placing of the creation stories at the beginning of the Bible has led to many confusions and misunderstandings. The placing of the book gets us to believe that creation was the central subject of the Old Testament faith. That is not the case. Faith in creation is neither the basis nor the goal.

The Bible really begins with the book of Exodus where Israel was called. Exodus is where God made covenant with Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph and Moses, this is central, not creation, but COVENANT.

To get on the right track. Creation is NOT doctrine, neither is it reporting history, it was not written to answer questions of modern science, nor was it written to address evolution nor the Big bang theory.

Creation is a story, a story told in different ways using traditions from other religions. The creation stories are told with vivid imagination. It is a poetic narrative where we are called to a faithful response to all that has been freely given to us.

Stories do not exist by themselves, nor for themselves. Stories exist for the community which is seriously engaged in a life of faith. Stories are not interested in deep structure nor in “abiding truths.” Stories offers nothing that is absolute certainty. Stories are always open-ended. Which is the reason the Bible is always alive and changing for me.

Gerhard von Rad reminds me that any story about creation “lies beyond human understanding.” My three biblical giants all talk about the authors of Genesis drawing from the deep well of Israel’s sacred mountains and weaving them together in a bumpy narrative about the ancient past.

I like to call the creation story as a proclamation coming from God where we act out of faith to do the right thing. I refer to creation as a hymn of praise where we confess our faith.

Waste and the void are turned into beauty. Chaos is turned into order, the formless is given form. This liturgy of wonder does not care about time and place. We are encouraged to dwell in the scene as it is given and play with its many meanings.

Instead of hammering down doctrines and theological insights let us understand like many of us, creation began in the shadows of life and through the covenant of Exodus we can move on with hope and love. Our chaotic waters can be calmed, our darkness can receive life, our burdens can be lifted, our shadows can receive light.

I am very comfortable with the idea that the creation story is an article of faith for which there is no scientific support. I invite those in the church to read the Bible in a more creative way and to those outside the church see the Bible as I do with all its contradictions and poor history as a book about love and reconciliation.

Amen,

Dennis Siebert