

Session 5: John 1:1-5 Genesis 1:1- (Lord of all life and power)

Welcome and Call to worship

There's an old children's rhyme that goes: Sticks and stone may break my bones, but words will never hurt me. Those of us who have experienced bullying by others, might well dispute this little ditty. Sometimes words can be very powerful, not just to hurt, but to affect us in many ways. They can also encourage, enable, envision, inspire and delight us.

How have you experienced the power of words in your life?

Last week we considered Jesus as being not only instrumental in the very origins of creation, but also the one who sustains it and will ultimately restore it to himself. We continue our exploration this week as we look at familiar words from the Book of Genesis and then from the beginning of John's Gospel. Both these passages reflect on the power of words, most particularly God's words, at the very start of creation.

We read it once – use several readers, as the passage is long!

Genesis 1 (The Message)

¹⁻²First this: God created the Heavens and Earth—all you see, all you don't see. Earth was a soup of nothingness, a bottomless emptiness, an inky blackness. God's Spirit brooded like a bird above the watery abyss.

³⁻⁵God spoke: "Light!"

And light appeared.

God saw that light was good
and separated light from dark.

God named the light Day,
he named the dark Night.

It was evening, it was morning—
Day One.

⁶⁻⁸God spoke: "Sky! In the middle of the waters;
separate water from water!"

God made sky.

He separated the water under sky
from the water above sky.

And there it was:

he named sky the Heavens;
It was evening, it was morning—
Day Two.

⁹⁻¹⁰God spoke: "Separate!

Water-beneath-Heaven, gather into one place;
Land, appear!"

And there it was.

God named the land Earth.

He named the pooled water Ocean.

God saw that it was good.

¹¹⁻¹³ God spoke: "Earth, green up! Grow all varieties

of seed-bearing plants,

Every sort of fruit-bearing tree."

And there it was.

Earth produced green seed-bearing plants,

all varieties,

And fruit-bearing trees of all sorts.

God saw that it was good.

It was evening, it was morning—

Day Three.

¹⁴⁻¹⁵ God spoke: "Lights! Come out!

Shine in Heaven's sky!

Separate Day from Night.

Mark seasons and days and years,

Lights in Heaven's sky to give light to Earth."

And there it was.

¹⁶⁻¹⁹ God made two big lights, the larger

to take charge of Day,

The smaller to be in charge of Night;

and he made the stars.

God placed them in the heavenly sky

to light up Earth

And oversee Day and Night,

to separate light and dark.

God saw that it was good.

It was evening, it was morning—

Day Four.

²⁰⁻²³ God spoke: "Swarm, Ocean, with fish and all sea life!

Birds, fly through the sky over Earth!"

God created the huge whales,

all the swarm of life in the waters,

And every kind and species of flying birds.

God saw that it was good.

God blessed them: "Prosper! Reproduce! Fill Ocean!

Birds, reproduce on Earth!"

It was evening, it was morning—
Day Five.

²⁴⁻²⁵ God spoke: "Earth, generate life! Every sort and kind:
cattle and reptiles and wild animals—all kinds."

And there it was:

wild animals of every kind,
Cattle of all kinds, every sort of reptile and bug.
God saw that it was good.

²⁶⁻²⁸ God spoke: "Let us make human beings in our image, make them
reflecting our nature

So they can be responsible for the fish in the sea,
the birds in the air, the cattle,
And, yes, Earth itself,
and every animal that moves on the face of Earth."

God created human beings;
he created them godlike,

Reflecting God's nature.

He created them male and female.

God blessed them:

"Prosper! Reproduce! Fill Earth! Take charge!

Be responsible for fish in the sea and birds in the air,
for every living thing that moves on the face of Earth."

²⁹⁻³⁰ Then God said, "I've given you
every sort of seed-bearing plant on Earth

And every kind of fruit-bearing tree,
given them to you for food.

To all animals and all birds,
everything that moves and breathes,
I give whatever grows out of the ground for food."
And there it was.

³¹ God looked over everything he had made;
it was so good, so very good!

It was evening, it was morning—
Day Six.

Modern science has diminished our confidence in the biblical creation accounts, but maybe the authors of our biblical record weren't writing modern science text books, and perhaps the purpose of their writing was very different as well. It is unreasonable to suppose that authors who were writing their accounts maybe 2 500 -3 000 years ago had access to modern scientific and evolutionary theory, so we do not compete with that. However, while they weren't pretending to be writing a scientific explanation of 'how' the universe was made, their priority was 'why' it came into being and 'who' initiated it in the first place!

As soon as we understand this, we can begin to enjoy the biblical account as a poetic encouragement to wonder and delight in the beauty and order of creation, to recognise the hand of God in the world around us and to see that, despite everything we have done to it, it is never the less, very good!

Can you think of a time when you have found yourself speechless or filled with delight in the natural world? How have you responded in those moments?

The Genesis account tells us that creation came about because God spoke. It was at his command that the universe sprang into being. In other biblical poems, we read that it was his command that ordered the stars in the skies, he knows each of them by name, and not one of them is missing. (Isaiah 40:26). The world was created wonderful, and full of everything creation needs to flourish. But, as human knowledge has expanded, so the earth – and increasingly – the planets are regarded as resources for us to discover and exploit, not simply to fulfil our needs, and increasingly our desires, and also as a source of wealth. This has resulted, over the years, in enormous riches for some in the world and incredible poverty for others, as their resources are exploited for our benefit. We see how intensive farming, irresponsible land development and the burning of fossil fuels have resulted in the degradation of the soil, pollution of the air and water, the warming of the climate and loss of habitat for wildlife, and only now are we beginning to realise the cost of this to ourselves and the future of our planet.

If we see the world as a gift from God, rather than just a resource to be used, how might it affect our relationship to it?

John 1:1-5. Read this through a couple of times with time to reflect in between the readings.

1 1-2 The Word was first,

the Word present to God,

God present to the Word.

The Word was God,

in readiness for God from day one.

3-5 Everything was created through him;

nothing—not one thing!—

came into being without him.

What came into existence was Life,

and the Life was Light to live by.

The Life-Light blazed out of the darkness;

the darkness couldn't put it out.

The opening words of John's Gospel, here in a less familiar form, are well known to us from our Carol Services. They are important to our Christmas worship because they remind us that in the Incarnation, the Creator of all that is, became human to reveal the love of God to the whole of creation.

Why do you think John refers to Jesus as 'the Word'.

How might Jesus as the 'Word of God' that enabled and commanded the very act of creation, affect the way we understand him?

How might it affect the way we see the rest of creation?

It is a common danger to see Jesus and the salvation he has won, as only affecting people. How might our understanding be changed by our study over the last few weeks. If Jesus' death and resurrection was for all of creation, how might that challenge our attitude to the world around us?