

The creation of a sermon takes a surprisingly long time. I started thinking about this sermon almost two weeks ago, when I was preparing to meet with the worship team. At first, I thought I knew what I had to preach - I have used this text before, so I was tempted to repeat my own ideas without any further wrestling with the Word of God. The words are so familiar, so poetic, and the themes announce themselves: creation, God making something out of nothing, humankind's relation to nature. It would be so easy to talk about all these things without coming up with any new ideas, since this ground has been covered so thoroughly before by every minister who has ever stood in this pulpit. But - I knew that I should ask God what the text is telling me *this* time; the words might be familiar, but God might have something new in mind, just for this week, this sermon. If we want to discover and listen to what God is saying to us, sometimes we have to start with, "We don't know", and ask God to show us the unfamiliar angles of a familiar text. That's not an easy task, I know, but it is worth noticing the difference between what we expect to hear from God and what God really wants to tell us. You may ask "who knows God's mind?" or "what if everyone has different answers from God even after careful listening?" But I am talking about our attitude toward God – being open and being humble before God, and acknowledging that it is God, not we, who created us and guides our lives.

I used to have a hard time understanding the meaning of "Ask, and it will be given to you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you." It sounded like blind faith to me, because my experience told me "That's not true – you can knock and knock, and sometimes that door simply will not open". But now I have a better understanding; Jesus doesn't guarantee that we are going to get whatever we ask, instead he encourages us to know our limitations in providing for ourselves, and our need to keep asking God to sustain us, to keep creating our lives and our world. Only if we constantly ask from God, can we stay in a right relationship with God.

So I gave up on my first ideas for this sermon, and read today's story over and over again, asking for God's guidance, and waiting for refreshing insights. As usual, God kept silent. But I appreciate the silence, because it reminds me that I have to listen

in order to discern God's will. Our Bible starts with the words; "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth". The people of God believed that God created the world, and that they lived in the world God created. It seems like such a simple message, but this passage was written in complicated times. The world of the writers of Genesis 1:1-2:4 is the world of the Babylonian exile and restoration, when Israel was seeking to reconstruct its life and beliefs. They lost their lands and temple, and were forced to live in another country, leaving everything behind. Yet the Israelites dared to believe that the God of the broken people was the same God who created the world, the Lord of everything in heaven and earth - including the Babylonians who oppressed them. When we say that we live in God's world, we dare to believe that we live in a world where love and compassion prevail, not in a world where money makes the rules, and injustice and violence help the powerful dominate the weak. That does not mean that we are not affected by those things, because we are. But we can live differently when we believe in a world of God's making, and not just our own missteps.

"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." Here "wind" translates the Hebrew "ruakh", whose basic meaning is "air". So it can be translated as either "wind" or "breath". Imagine staring into nothingness – no light, no movement, no sound – just endless darkness. It sounds like being stuck in the deepest sorrow, or relentless depression. And then the wind comes, and you know that, even if it is still dark, something is moving, not taking you away from that place but changing that place around you. Again that is not based on what people saw, but based on what people believed and experienced. When the people of God were in times of oppression, God heard their cry, and prepared to set them free; the wind or breath of God embraced the people even before the Exodus. God is with us even in times of uncertainty.

The creation story continues as God creates the light, sky, earth, and every living being including humankind. Notice that after each creation, God saw that it was good. Everything God made is good to God just as it is, before it is touched by humankind. So it is our responsibility to see things as they really are with respect because they all are from God. The Bible says that only humankind was made in

God's image; God said, "Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness and let them have dominion over the fish over the sea, and over the birds of the air....." With the growing concern for the environment and the human effect upon it, the word "dominion" has received extraordinary attention. "Dominion" means "rule", as is illustrated by its use elsewhere for the authority of masters over servants and kings over their subjects; so it does grant humanity a potent authority over the animal world. But the word does not in itself define the exercise of this power, since it can be used for either benevolent or harsh rule. In the context of Genesis 1, where human beings are viewed as God's representatives in creation, dominion must be understood as the same kind of rule God would exercise in the natural world, a world God created good in all of its parts. In the second creation story, in Genesis 2, the first human is made out of the soil and is given the command to cultivate it. This Hebrew term means literally "serve." So here we can have a better understanding about stewardship; we have to look after the earth, not because God gave it to us, but because we are made from it, and are part of it.

The creation story comes to a climax with the establishment of the seventh day of the week as a sacred day of rest. "And on the seventh day God finished the work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all the work that he had done. So God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it, because on it God rested from all the work that he had done in creation." Resting is a very important part of the creation process, because the world was completed with God's resting. We say, in A New Creed of the United Church, "We believe in God who has created and is creating." I wonder how God can be continually creating. If resting is part of the creation process, God's continuous creation coexists with God's stillness or silence. In the Bible and in our own lives, there are times when God seems silent or even far away, but now we can understand that those times are also important to God as part of God's new creation. Just as the creation of this sermon had to begin with letting go of all my familiar old ideas about Genesis, sometimes our own faith has to be refreshed by letting go of our assumptions and letting God show us how He is creating every moment of our lives. Even if we struggle in darkness, the wind of God blows all around us, and we know the light will follow.