

SLIDE 1. ANCHORED: A Study of What We Believe and Why

Teaching: **Article 3: Creation and Humanity**

Sunday November 5, 2023

We are in a not-so-short teaching series called ANCHORED: *A Study of What We Believe and Why* – because knowing what we believe and why is important when we are **talking to others** about what we believe and why - as people who are anchored by a shared understanding of the fundamentals of our faith.

We broke from it last Sunday for our Mini Missions Fest – which was fantastic! – and we will break from it again from time to time over the course of the next # of months.

Week 1 - we looked at Article 1 of our Confession of Faith: GOD.

SLIDE 2 + 3. This is what our Confession of Faith says – in digest form - about the being and nature of God...

We believe in the one true God, who reigns over all things as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and who lovingly cares for all creation. God the Father planned the redemption of humanity and sent Jesus Christ the Son to be the Savior of the world. Jesus proclaimed the reign of God, bringing good news to the poor and triumphing over sin through his obedient life, death, and resurrection. God the Holy Spirit empowers believers with new life, indwells them, and unites them in one body.

SLIDE 4 + 5. Week 2 - we looked at Article 2 of our Confession of Faith: the REVELATION OF GOD. This is what our Confession of Faith says – in digest form - about how we come to know God...

We believe God has made Himself known to all people. Beginning with creation and culminating in Jesus Christ, God has revealed Himself in the Old and New Testaments. All Scripture is inspired by God and is the authoritative guide for faith and practice. We interpret the Scripture in the church community as guided by the Holy Spirit.

I'll bet you'll never guess what we're looking at this morning...

SLIDE 6. Article 3 of our Confession of Faith: Creation and Humanity.

This is what our Confession of Faith says – in digest form – about how the world came into being – including us...

We believe God created the heavens and the earth, and they were good. Humans, God's crowning act, were created in the image of God. Sin has alienated humanity from the Creator and creation, but God offers redemption and reconciliation through Jesus Christ.

APPETIZER.

SLIDE 7. "A God wise enough to create me and the world I live in is wise enough to watch out for me." Philip Yancey

Thoughts?

MAIN COURSE.

I suspect that Yancey's thought is a strange one to lots of people these days.

That there is a *God*.

That that *God* created the world.

That that *God* cares about you and me.

Because we live in a world that has 2 predominant creation narratives: evolution and pantheism.

Darwinism (or what we might call the theory of evolution) teaches that the existence of the universe and the presence of humanity on the planet are the result of a powerful and impersonal force set in motion by chance.

That all species are related and gradually change over time.

That humans have evolved over countless eons – just as other animals have done.

That all species of organisms arise and develop through the natural selection of small, inherited variations that increase the individual's ability to compete, survive, and reproduce.

But – we wonder – as people of faith. How could this be? How could something so beautiful and complex as creation happen by chance over eons of time?

So, we theologize...

SLIDE 8. "What can be more foolish than to think that all this rare fabric of heaven and earth could come by chance, when all the skill of art is not able to make an oyster!" A cleric in the Church of England, *Jeremy Taylor* – the Shakespeare of the Divines (1613 – 1667).

SLIDE 9. "There are enough evidences of supreme skill in the structure of the human hand alone to prove the existence, intelligence and benevolence of God in the face of all the sophistry of infidelity." Canadian preacher, theologian, author, and founder of the Christian and Missionary Alliance (1843-1919), *A. B. Simpson*

Or as internationally known astronomer and authority on life in the cosmos, Robert Jastrow, says: "It is not a matter of another year, another decade of work, another measurement, or another theory; at this moment it seems as though science will never be able to raise the curtain on the mystery of creation.

For scientists who have lived by their faith in the power of reason, the story ends like a bad dream. They have scaled the mountains of ignorance; they are about to conquer the highest peaks; as they pull themselves over the final rock, they are greeted by a band of theologians who have been sitting there for centuries.”

BCMB COF, p. 48

On the other hand – many believe that there is some universal force in which all living things participate – that God and the universe are one and the same – rather than separate things – that “God is all, and all is God.”

This is pantheism – *pan*, meaning *all*, and *theos*, meaning *God*.

This is *Star Wars*.

This view of creation is problematic for at least 2 reasons.

It sublimates humanity, and it obliterates God (as does the theory of evolution).

According to this worldview – human life has no special value and human individuality has no destiny or purpose apart from being dissolved into this impersonal force.

This is *Star Trek* – the Borg. “Resistance is futile.”

We are nothing apart from the collective - says pantheism.

But is this true?

Though we know that we are made for relationship – we aren’t nothing on our own.

SLIDE 10. As Max Lucado has said - **“You weren't an accident. You weren't mass produced. You aren't an assembly-line product. You were deliberately planned, specifically gifted, and lovingly positioned on the Earth by the Master Craftsman.”** *Max Lucado*

And yet our pantheistic friends would have us believe that God – the Master Craftsman – is just the sum total of the vital forces which animate the universe.

Which – if you believe this – leaves no room for God to exist apart from the physical universe.

Which – if you believe this – makes nature the ultimate reality.

Which – if you believe this – leads humanity to worshipping created things as opposed to worshipping the Creator.

Which Paul says is a really bad idea – one worthy of God’s wrath: *They* (those who don’t believe in God and those who have turned away from God) *exchanged the truth of God for a lie and worshipped and served created things rather than the Creator* (Ro. 1:25).

The Scriptures – however - teach that the universe is *not* the result of some random, anonymous, powerful force – into which we all melt into one amorphous blob – like blocks of Baker’s chocolate into a heated saucepan. *Nope*.

The Scriptures say that the universe was created by a personal, moral, and compassionate being who wishes to be in a loving and reciprocal relationship with humanity (Gen. 1:1-2:1; Ps. 8:3-8; 24:1-2; 89:11; 95:5; 104:1-35; Prov. 8:22-31; Isa. 40:12-31; Jn. 1:1-4, 10; 17:5; 1 Cor. 8:6; Col. 1:15-17; Heb. 11:3; Rev. 4:8-11).

Without whom – we cannot know what it means to be human.

I really like how one commentator puts it...

“It is ultimately impossible to understand the fundamental character of human nature and existence without an absolute point of reference. In the absence of such a context, subjectivity becomes the only operative principle in defining the relationship between humankind and the world.

Humanity then becomes its own point of reference; it literally becomes the center of the universe. Such a philosophical stance has formidable implications for the whole spectrum of ethics and human endeavours.

The way we view human life and how we deal with ethical issues such as abortion, euthanasia, palliative care, law enforcement, the nature of the state, and so on, depend entirely on our frame of reference.

Without God, we are condemned to forgetting what truly defines human nature and thus the rationale for compassion.”

BCMB COF, p. 45

Without God, we are not image-bearers of the Creator.

Without God, we are not called to represent God in creation.

With God, human life *has* special dignity and value – as free-will beings (singular in creation) and as worth dying for (as Jesus Christ did at the cross for all humanity).

With God, men and women *are* made in the image of God – creative and free – even - free to reject God – because that is what love requires – the possibility of rejection.

With God, we are responsible for the proper care of creation – as managers of what God has made.

SLIDE 11. As the Scripture says: ***God blessed them*** (Adam and Eve) ***and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground"*** (Gen. 1:28).

Which is to say – have babies, more and more - generation over generation, and populate the planet.

Why? To rule it. To care for it as God's caretakers.

There are 2 Hebrew words here that help us understand the meaning of the English word – *rule* - *kavash* + *radah* (Strong's: #3533).

Kavash – means - *to subdue* – suggesting – at least – that there is a hierarchy within creation – that humanity is responsible for the proper care of creation – not vice versa.

Radah – means - *to descend, to go down, to wander and to spread* – to rule by going down and walking among the other created things.

Taken together – we are created to represent God in creation.

SLIDE 12. In this – there are **2 extremes to avoid as it relates to how we think about creation and humanity.**

1. That we would consider men and women as merely one more form of life among others – having no more significance than fish or birds or animals or plants or blades of grass.

Scripture teaches that human beings are unique among God's creation. Only people – for instance – are created in God's image.

Then God said, "Let us make humankind in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground." So, God created them in his own image, in the image of God he created humankind; male and female he created them (Gen. 1:26-27).

This sets us apart from all of creation.

When King David reflected on the majesty of God and God's creation – he wrote – inspired by God: *You made him (humankind) a little lower than the heavenly beings (which could refer to the angels or even – perhaps – God) and crowned him with glory and honor (Ps. 8:5).*

Kavash. All life is valued but none above the life of a human.

When we are more committed to the well-being of our pets than we are the health of our fellow human beings – we distort and degrade the value and sanctity of human life.

Compare – for instance – the degree of public interest in saving threatened animal species to the plight of starving children. For many, animal rights have become more important than human rights. *Does this make sense?*

2. That we would exploit creation (based on this special position we have over the rest of creation).

We cannot interpret our responsibility to *rule* over the earth as a license to dominate, deface, and destroy it. We cannot treat the earth as a commodity to be exploited and abused, consumed, and discarded. We cannot care less for that which God has charged us to care for.

I hope we know this. I hope we live like this.

And yet - a recent survey revealed that the more frequently a person attended religious services – the greater the person’s tendency was to hold domineering or oppressive attitudes toward nature (Granberg-Michaelson, 2-3).

What?! How does that happen?

Because we’re afraid to be identified with (extreme) environmentalists?

Like those Just Stop Oil activists who threw tomato soup onto a Van Gogh painting in London – who asked what was worth more – a painting or food and justice for all? Like Rainn Wilson (aka. Dwight – from *The Office*) who changed his name to “Rainfall Heat Wave Extreme Winter Wilson” in a call for urgent action to fight climate change? Like those parkouring 20-somethings in Paris who turned off unnecessary energy-guzzling store lights as a protest of the current energy crisis engulfing Europe?

Because this isn’t our home anyway?

As the old gospel hymn put it, “This world is not my home. I’m just a passin’ through.”

Because this planet is scheduled for a massive renovation – a new heaven and a new earth (2 Pt. 3:11-13; Rev. 21:1-5) – so why bother maintaining it?

If any of these rationalizations is nibbling at the back of our brains – let me remind us:

1. The mandate of Gen. 1 – to rule over the earth – has not been lifted. It is still in effect for those of us who follow Jesus Christ.
2. We are called to care for God’s creation – and one way we can do this is to become creation care activists - like our friends at AROCHA – just down the road from here – who are committed to the conservation and restoration of the natural world through both scientific research and conservation projects – who host experiential learning opportunities on site that transform knowledge into caring action – who connect us to the environment where our food is grown through their Community Shared Agriculture program and Farm to Families program.

And then every day – to make a conscious effort to reduce consumption and waste, to respect natural resources, and to recycle what we can in our homes, workplaces, and our church.

TAKE OUT

Liturgical Reading: Creation and Humanity

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

**Beauty erupted out of blackness,
perfection sparkled where chaos once reigned,
a universe clean and pure.**

The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it: the world, and all that fills it.

**O Lord, You delight in Your creation,
and all creation delights in Your care
and sustaining presence.**

But who are we, that You should take notice of us, we poor mortals, that You even look at us?

**O God, You were not content with beauty alone,
You desired love, and created us in Your image
to love You and live with You.
Male and female You made us, to name it and tame it,
to enjoy it and offer it back to You,
in ministries of exploration and care.**

Holy God, we failed You at the beginning, we have sinned ever since. As sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, so life and salvation have entered through Jesus Christ.

**God's light shines in the darkness,
and the darkness cannot put it out.
We live in the pain of Eden's curse,
we live with the promise of Eden regained.**

All creation waits with bated breath, for the glorious return of Christ; who makes all things new; and God shall be all in all.

**Let the heavens rejoice, let the earth be glad,
let the sea roar, let the fields celebrate!
Then shall all the trees of the field rejoice before the Lord,
for He comes, He comes bringing justice to all the earth.**