

# And It Was So

by Rev. Dr. John C. Tittle



"The Creation of Man," Marc Chagall, Lithograph

## Prayer of Illumination

Pour out your Holy Spirit, O God,  
And prepare our hearts to accept your word.  
Silence in us any voice but your own,  
That, hearing, we may also obey your will;  
Through Jesus Christ our Lord.  
Amen.



### Old Testament Reading: Genesis 1:1-2, 4a (NRSVue)

<sup>1</sup> When God began to create<sup>[a]</sup> the heavens and the earth, <sup>2</sup> the earth was complete chaos, and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God<sup>[b]</sup> swept over the face of the waters. <sup>3</sup> Then God said, “Let there be light,” and there was light. <sup>4</sup> And God saw that the light was good, and God separated the light from the darkness. <sup>5</sup> God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day.

<sup>6</sup> And God said, “Let there be a dome in the midst of the waters, and let it separate the waters from the waters.” <sup>7</sup> So God made the dome and separated the waters that were under the dome from the waters that were above the dome. And it was so. <sup>8</sup> God called the dome Sky. And there was evening and there was morning, the second day.

<sup>9</sup> And God said, “Let the waters under the sky be gathered together into one place, and let the dry land appear.” And it was so. <sup>10</sup> God called the dry land Earth, and the waters that were gathered together he called Seas. And God saw that it was good. <sup>11</sup> Then God said, “Let the earth put forth vegetation: plants yielding seed and fruit trees of every kind on earth that bear fruit with the seed in it.” And it was so. <sup>12</sup> The earth brought forth vegetation: plants yielding seed of every kind and trees of every kind bearing fruit with the seed in it. And God saw that it was good. <sup>13</sup> And there was evening and there was morning, the third day.

<sup>14</sup> And God said, “Let there be lights in the dome of the sky to separate the day from the night, and let them be for signs and for seasons and for days and years, <sup>15</sup> and let them be lights in the dome of the sky to give light upon the earth.” And it was so. <sup>16</sup> God made the two great lights—the greater light to rule the day and the lesser light to rule the night—and the stars. <sup>17</sup> God set them in the dome of the sky to give light upon the earth, <sup>18</sup> to rule over the day and over the night, and to separate the light from the darkness. And God saw that it was good. <sup>19</sup> And there was evening and there was morning, the fourth day.

<sup>20</sup> And God said, "Let the waters bring forth swarms of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the dome of the sky." <sup>21</sup> So God created the great sea monsters and every living creature that moves, of every kind, with which the waters swarm and every winged bird of every kind. And God saw that it was good. <sup>22</sup> God blessed them, saying, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth." <sup>23</sup> And there was evening and there was morning, the fifth day.

<sup>24</sup> And God said, "Let the earth bring forth living creatures of every kind: cattle and creeping things and wild animals of the earth of every kind." And it was so. <sup>25</sup> God made the wild animals of the earth of every kind and the cattle of every kind and everything that creeps upon the ground of every kind. And God saw that it was good.

<sup>26</sup> Then God said, "Let us make humans<sup>[a]</sup> in our image, according to our likeness, and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over the cattle and over all the wild animals of the earth<sup>[a]</sup> and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth."

<sup>27</sup> So God created humans<sup>[a]</sup> in his image,  
in the image of God he created them;<sup>[f]</sup>  
male and female he created them.

<sup>28</sup> God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth." <sup>29</sup> God said, "See, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is upon the face of all the earth and every tree with seed in its fruit; you shall have them for food. <sup>30</sup> And to every beast of the earth and to every bird of the air and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food." And it was so. <sup>31</sup> God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.

**2** Thus the heavens and the earth were finished and all their multitude. <sup>2</sup> On the sixth<sup>[a]</sup> day God finished the work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all the work that he had done. <sup>3</sup> So God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it, because on it God rested from all the work that he had done in creation.

<sup>4</sup> These are the generations of the heavens and the earth when they were created.

***The grass withers and the flower fades,  
but the Word of God endures forever.***

## SERMON – “And It Was So”

“First sentences are doors to worlds,” wrote Ursula Le Guin in her essay *The Fisherwoman’s Daughter*. See if you can remember who wrote these famous first sentences in these classic novels:

“It was the best of times, it was the worst of times.”

– Charles Dickens *A Tale of Two Cities*

“Happy families are all alike; unhappy families are all unhappy in their own way.”

– Tolstoy *Anna Karenina*

“Call me Ishmail.”

– Herman Melville in *Moby Dick*

“I am an invisible man.”

– Ralph Ellison in *Invisible Man*

“It was a bright cold day in April, and the clocks were striking thirteen.”

– George Orwell in *1984*

“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth...”

– The Book of Genesis

Genesis 1:1 is probably the most famous opening line in all of literature. In that short sentence we’re told what it’s *all* about, what is foundational for life:

*Where do we come from?*

*Who are we?*

*How shall we live?*

*What is God like?*

I like how Rabbi Jonathan Sacks describes Genesis as allowing us “*to see ourselves as we really are, infinitesimal, fallible and frail, yet touched by the wings of infinity.*”

God has no beginning. But *we* have a beginning. Genesis tells us about “the beginning of beginnings,” the birth of the universe and our origins as human beings. And we were created for a purpose. Our universe and lives are the product of a single will. And because of this, human life is meaningful—not random or pointless.

We also know from Genesis that **God and God alone is the Creator**. God didn’t duke it out with other gods, barely winning the heavy weight world champion belt in a technical knockout in the 12<sup>th</sup> round. No, God did this solo. There was no competition. And this world of ours didn’t come into existence by accident or chance. God is the Creator and is Eternal—with no beginning or

ending. There are no origin or birth stories for God who has always existed. God just shows up in Genesis. No proofs for his existence. He just *is*.

One way to understand this is like introducing a character in a movie. We don't know anything about the character when he or she first appears. But we do come to know them in the unfolding of the story over the course of the film.

By the end of Genesis 1 we learn a lot about God from his words and actions. By the end of the book of Genesis we know a lot more. We learn quickly that God is our Creator. This word "create" is only used of God in the Bible. Humans do not do this creating—only God does. God *enables* his creation to have creative powers: The earth can produce. The sea can bring forth. Trees have seeds. Animals have potential to procreate. We can be fruitful and multiply. By God's grace and gifting, we can be creative. But our Creator God transcends nature—He is outside of time and space. Everything that exists—was created by God and depends upon God. Creation is not God. When we forget this, we fall into idolatry—worshiping the created instead of the Creator.

Genesis subtly puts sun and moon and stars (*and also the sea monsters*) in their place—literally and figuratively. They are not God—they are created by the Creator, being brought into existence on the 4th day. Sun and moon do serve God and people by signifying set times for festivals and calendaring. We look to them for direction and orientation. We look upon them and enjoy their beauty. But we don't worship them. We give thanks, not to the universe, but to the Creator of the Stars. Genesis teaches us how to be in proper relation with creation and the Creator. God's creation is good. We're to enjoy it, to live in it, to tend it—not escape from it. We're stewards of it—not owners. Like a beautiful piece of artwork—we treasure it and protect it. We don't exploit or destroy the earth.

The good news is this Creator God is not distant, but personal—not just merely a force. God didn't create and then walk away to the next project. God speaks and acts and perceives. "*And God said*"... "*Let there be...*" *And so it was.* "*And God saw that it was good.*" God's word is living and active and creative and it will not return void. It will accomplish what it set out to do. God needs only to say the word and it will happen—there's no one to challenge Him.

Here's some more good news: Our Creator God can transform chaos into harmony, order, and peace. The wonderful Hebrew word for that complete chaos and unformed void is *tohu bohu*. And no, it's not the newest "bougie" plant-based protein meal. It's fun to say, in fact—repeat after me: "Tohu... Bohu..."

God transformed the *tohu bohu* of chaos into the beauty of God's good earth. God created exodus out of the *tohu bohu* of exile in Egypt. God can create harmony and peace out of our personal and national *tohu bohu*—when we feel that everything is going down the toilet. God can sculpt our formless void into something livable. He can take our darkness into light.

Our sin, our doubts, our fears, our histories are all raw material for God's creation. God is the chaos whisperer. God alone can bring harmony with God, with ourselves, with creation.

Despite the huge difference between us and God, Genesis says we're made in God's image, meaning we're in a special relationship with God. All the other creatures are mentioned "of every kind." But there's only one kind of human—humankind. We are equal and special—no one above another. Both male AND female are made in God's image. We're all royals.

It's only on Day 6, when we were created that God says His creative work is "very good." To be made in God's likeness means we aren't machines or puppets—we're persons, with wills, personalities, and imaginations. We are the only ones that God communicates with. But we still need to remember we're *not* God. The rabbis have a great response to the reasons why humans were created last. When you're humble and looking to God—all of creation was made for you. You're the pinnacle of God's creation, created on the sixth day. But if this starts getting to your head and you become arrogant and self-important—you've got to re-remember: a gnat preceded you. They were before you.

Made in God's image also means that we're called to resemble our Creator, "Be holy because I am holy." God is gracious, so be gracious. God is merciful, so be merciful. God is compassionate, so be compassionate. God is forgiving, so be forgiving. God is creative, so be creative. We're different from the wild animals and creeping creatures. Since everyone is made in the image of God—male female, stranger, foreigner, enemy—we're to see the image of God in them and to uphold every person's dignity. When they're in need... we care for them.

Those we love, dislike, don't know, annoy us, disagree with us, or bring us joy—we treat them with respect, no matter their gender, sexual orientation, race, history, profession, nationality, or salary—they are made in God's image. By seeing the image of God in others, we help others see who they truly are—created by God and loved by God.

Just as God did for us, so we do for others, by God's grace.

Amen.

Sermon Art: Marc Chagall, "*Creation of Man*" lithograph, 1986, [chairish.com](http://chairish.com)

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