

Is It Good?
Genesis 1:1-4a June 19, 2011

- I. In Genesis creation was declared “good.”
 - A. Any of you have a problem with that?
 - B. God created it and then God said it was good.
 - C. So in a world where earthquakes and tsunamis and tornadoes and hurricanes violently destroy the lives of hundreds and thousands of people; where draught and famine can kill millions; what exactly do we mean if we call this ‘Good’?
 1. Good for who?
 2. Good for what?
 3. Good like a bullet to the brain is good for keeping a well ventilated cool head.
 4. With scenes like the ones from Japan and Joplin, where we find so much natural created evil how can we buy into the notion that this creation is good?
- II. True just being here is GOOD. It’s really great.
But, how could a good God create a world where there is so much natural

evil?

Let's try out some answers to this question.

- A. The first answer is that there is no God and the natural world is just indifferent to human suffering.
Some people in the face of evil quickly and perhaps all too easily jump to that conclusion.
- B. The second answer might be that God isn't good.
There is a god, but God is indifferent to human suffering and both good and evil come from God.
That is actually the position held by much of the Hebrew Scriptures – but not by the priests who wrote the 1st chapter of Genesis.
- C. The Gnostics solved the problem by saying that it wasn't GOD that created the cosmos, but a demi-god.
This demi-god is a divine being God created, but not **the** God;
and this demi-god is what created the cosmos and this divine being, being less than perfect, created a less than perfect world.

- D. Another answer that was popular around the first century was that another demi-god of sorts decided to try to take control of the earth away from God and God for some unknown reason let this creature do this.

This demi-god figure is known as Satan or the devil and he is the cause of all the evil until someday God finally decides to toss him out.

Some believed that Jesus would come back to do just that.

- E. Another answer comes from, of course, the story of Adam and Eve that we find in the second chapter of Genesis, a story written, not by the priests who wrote Chapter 1, but by some theologians.

Their answer is that evil is the result of humans, as represented by Adam and Eve, exercising their freedom in a way that separates them from God and brings evil into the world.

1. This of course explains why there might be moral evil and evil that results from human freedom, and God knows we've got plenty of that; but it doesn't do much for explaining the evil that comes from earthquake, wind, flood and fire.

2. The ancient Hebrew prophets understood this and **some** of them decided that such natural evil was caused by God.

That's right -- God made it happen.

God was punishing people for their evil actions and their separation from God. A position take by Pat Robertson and other current fundamentalist preachers.

But other prophets pointed out, that the rain falls on both the good and the bad and all too often the good seem to suffer while the evil folk prosper. And these prophets were sensitive to the question of, "How can a good God violently, torturously, kill millions of innocent infants and children who certainly did no wrong?"

F. But there is another answer that is hinted at in one of the stories of the prophet Elijah and amended by the answer given in the opening chapter of Genesis.

1. First the story about the prophet Elijah, who was seeking to hear the voice of God.

At Horeb, the mount of God, Elijah came to a cave, and spent the night there.

Then the word of the ETERNAL ONE came to him, saying, "What are you doing here, Elijah?"

He answered,

"I have been very zealous for the ETERNAL ONE, the God of hosts; for the Israelites have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and killed your

prophets with the sword. I alone am left, and they are seeking my life, to take it away."

The messenger of God said,

"Go out and stand on the mountain before the ETERNAL ONE, for the ETERNAL ONE is about to pass by."

Now there was a great wind, so strong that it was splitting mountains and breaking rocks in pieces before the ETERNAL ONE, but the ETERNAL ONE was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake, but the ETERNAL ONE was not in the earthquake; and after the earthquake a fire, but the ETERNAL ONE was not in the fire; and after the fire a sound of sheer silence.

When Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his mantle and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave.

Then there came a voice to him that said,

"What are you doing here, Elijah?"

Elijah answered,

"I have been very zealous for the ETERNAL ONE, the God of hosts; for the Israelites have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword. I alone am left, and they are seeking my life, to take it away."

Then the ETERNAL ONE said to him,

"Go, return on your way to the wilderness of Damascus; when you arrive, you shall anoint Hazael as king over Aram.

- a) From this passage we see that God is not in the wind, the earthquake, or the fire; or we should add the flood or the famine.

b) God is not found in the destructive forces of nature, but rather God is found in the quiet voice of the Spirit.

2. And now we go back to the opening of Genesis and listen carefully.

In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, 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.
Then God said, "Let there be light";
and there was light.
And God saw that the light was **good**;

3. So what did we hear?

a) In the beginning there was God and....
and what? God and what?

b) In the beginning there was God and the waters.

c) In ancient Middle Eastern mythology, the underlying worldview during the time when the Priests were writing, these waters are the waters of chaos out of which God creates and brings order.

d) So in the Priestly creation story, God is not creating out of nothing.

e) The earth is formed out of these chaotic waters and it is there in that we find the cause of evil.

- f) Creation is formed, order is given, by a Good God, with good intentions and providing a good creation, but this order that we might call the 'law of nature' is imposed upon a substance that is inherently chaotic.
This is a notion that is not all that far from current understanding of physics.

III. We have all been brought up with the idea that was actually developed by Greek philosophers and in the 2nd century further developed by the church Fathers, that the world was created by God out of nothing; but that was not the position of the Priests who wrote 1st Genesis – nor is it one that is necessarily helpful to us.

- A. Let us imagine that like the priests said, something and God have always been.
- B. Science might say it as, there is nature and the laws of Nature that bring order to nature or describe the order nature has.
- C. The Gospel of John would call that ordering principle the Logos, or the Word.

- D. The philosopher Alfred North Whitehead would call it the aim of the principle of concretion – or God.
- E. In all of these there is “something” and that which gives order to this “something.”
- F. And from modern physics to the ancient priests who wrote 1st Genesis, this something that is given order is inherently chaotic, it is free and undetermined; ultimately uncontrollable.
Working with it is a bit like herding cats.
- G. At the very heart of reality is freedom; a freedom that despite God’s good intent, will and action to bring it under control and give it order is still free.
And so....
As the phrase goes –
poo poo happens.

IV. So if you followed all that – excellent.
If not let me summarize.

- A. We were trying to answer the question of -- if God is good then why is so much natural – created -- evil happening?
- B. The answer I finally offered is the same one that the priests offered in the first chapter of

Genesis;
namely that God created out of a substance that is inherently chaotic.

- C. But let me amend that by saying that God is still creating out of that chaos.**
- D. God is working to bring loving goodness, harmony, beauty to everything, but the material God has to work with is unstable, it's free, undetermined and it is this freedom at the foundations of reality that results in evil;**
not just human freedom causing moral evil, but the freedom of nature that is indifferent to humans.
- E. There is another answer to the question of evil that can be added to the answer I just gave.**
This new answer that is based on the answer I just gave is that within the creation that is inherently free; evil is also caused by conflicting goods.
 - 1. So what is good for the cancer is not good for us.**
 - 2. What is good for us is not good for the virus or the mosquito.**
 - 3. What is good for the balance and stabilization of the planet earth; like earthquakes and tsunamis**

and hurricanes; is not good for some of us; depending on where you live. The earthquake in one place may relieve the tectonic pressure and keep an earthquake from happening in another place.

V. So in this world we live in – poo poo happens.

In light of the poo poo that happens **we** need to be creative.

We who are created in the image of God; we too, like God, have the divine challenge of creating out of chaos.

- A. Of course as we know ever so well even our best and most well intentioned and loving creations can result in evil.
- B. After all, if it happens to God, why should we expect that we can do any better?
- C. Still as the old catechisms would teach, it is our purpose in life to bring glory to God; and the way we do that is by building God's Realm, by being the hands of God in creating the kind of loving world that God intends.
- D. Our challenge, our divine calling, is to follow in God's footsteps and try to harness for the

realm of God that which is inherently chaotic.

- E. This is the Priestly story of the creation found in Chapter one of Genesis; Out of chaos God created order and the last creation was us, created in the image of God to continue in God's creativity; to continue with God in giving loving order to that which otherwise would be chaotic and indifferent.
- F. And as we can all too easily tell, we and God are still working at it.

VI. God is good and God is great and we thank God for all we have; but poo poo still happens.

A. As Jesus taught us:

Is there a father among you, a parent among you who, if your child asks for bread, will give a stone?

Or if the child asks for a fish, will give a snake?

If you then, who are sinful humans, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good things to those who ask him! [Mat 7:9-11]

- B. But then of course, left to the chaotic nature inherent in all there is, the bread will get moldy and make us sick.
But then inspired by God's love, **we** will be creative and learn how to turn the mold into penicillin.
After all, we are created in the image of God.
AMEN.