

Genesis 2:4-25

4 This is the account of the heavens and the earth when they were created.

On the day the Lord God made earth and sky— 5 before any wild plants appeared on the earth, and before any field crops grew, because the Lord God hadn't yet sent rain on the earth and there was still no human being[c] to farm the fertile land, 6 though a stream rose from the earth and watered all of the fertile land— 7 the Lord God formed the human[d] from the topsoil of the fertile land[e] and blew life's breath into his nostrils. The human came to life. 8 The Lord God planted a garden in Eden in the east and put there the human he had formed. 9 In the fertile land, the Lord God grew every beautiful tree with edible fruit, and also he grew the tree of life in the middle of the garden and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

10 A river flows from Eden to water the garden, and from there it divides into four headwaters. 11 The name of the first river is the Pishon. It flows around the entire land of Havilah, where there is gold. 12 That land's gold is pure, and the land also has sweet-smelling resins and gemstones. [f] 13 The name of the second river is the Gihon. It flows around the entire land of Cush. 14 The name of the third river is the Tigris, flowing east of Assyria; and the name of the fourth river is the Euphrates.

15 The Lord God took the human and settled him in the garden of Eden to farm it and to take care of it. 16 The Lord God commanded the human, "Eat your fill from all of the garden's trees; 17 but don't eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, because on the day you eat from it, you will die!" 18 Then the Lord God said, "It's not good that the human is alone. I will make him a helper that is perfect for him." 19 So the Lord God formed from the fertile land all the wild animals and all the birds in the sky and brought them to the human to see what he would name them. The human gave each living being its name. 20 The human named all the livestock, all the birds in the sky, and all the wild animals. But a helper perfect for him was nowhere to be found.

21 So the Lord God put the human into a deep and heavy sleep, and took one of his ribs and closed up the flesh over it. 22 With the rib taken from the human, the Lord God fashioned a woman and brought her to the human being. 23 The human[g] said,

"This one finally is bone from my bones
and flesh from my flesh.
She will be called a woman[h]
because from a man[i] she was taken."

24 This is the reason that a man leaves his father and mother and embraces his wife, and they become one flesh. 25 The two of them were naked, the man and his wife, but they weren't embarrassed.

Sermon

Grace to you and peace from God our Creator, our Lord Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit: Amen.

Your eyes open for the first time, and you see unspeakable beauty. Vibrant colors, diverse shapes, incredible movement. Waves of smells crash into you, most overwhelming in their multiplicity, and every touch shouts with a new texture upon your skin. This place, somehow, is your home – you're sure of it – though you've never been here before. There's literally nothing like you, and yet you find it all so majestic. Another seems to know what's going on, what's happening, and this Other invites you to not just experience this world, but to explore it, to become a part of it, to name it because, well, no one else has been here before! We don't yet know what to call these things. So, that thing moving in the air? Let's call it a bird! But there's so many of them. So only the ones with feathers are birds. We'll

discuss the ones that buzz later. But there's so many different colors and shapes and sounds for these birds, too! Cardinal. Canary. Turkey. Hummingbird. Peacock. Ostrich. Dodo. C'mon! It's Eden, after all. I'm guessing at the beginning of all things even the oddest of birds could flock into the sky.

But still something's not quite right. There's tons of companions, but still there's none like you, at least until you wake up on morning with a deep pain in your side and a friend, a partner, who matches you completely and yet is everything that you're not. You find in this other not just the beauty of all the creations that you have named, but the completion of your being, the fullness of your species, the wholeness of your creaturehood. And together, you're naked yet not lustful, vulnerable and yet not embarrassed, not ashamed, not afraid. You're courageous in this world that God's given to you.

Adventure, community, and courage. Those things, dear friends, are the origins of our being in the Garden of Eden. **Adventure** because this world is a place of wonder that God created and because God invites us to become co-creators, to explore what God's made and to name these divinely shaped creatures to give some order to the world. **Community** because we're called to be a part of the creation that we're naming and shaping, called to be Adam, literally the *earth-creature*, and Eve, literally *living*. Adam and Eve aren't names that mean male and female, but names that together mean we're literally the living dust of the earth. **Courage** because we're absolutely vulnerable, for not even clothing separates us from one another or from God, and yet we know nothing except excitement for the future that God's laid out for us. That's who we're created to be, before sin enters the world, before we deny God's

leadership and take fruit from the tree from which we're forbidden to eat.

I don't know about you, but this kind of picture is just so alien to most of my life experience. Rather than an adventure, many days feel like a sluggish slog through sludge. Even in the things that I want to do, I find myself just overwhelmed with the mundanity of it all. Earlier this week, I was working on this sermon (and I love preaching), I was preparing for classes in the fall at NRCC and LR (and I love teaching), I was prepping for campus ministry at RU and NRCC (and I love campus ministry), I was prepping for the Rough Draught Coffee House (and I love the arts, coffee, desserts, and our speaker), I was prepping for Carowinds (and I love rollercoasters), and rather than find the adventure in it all, I was caught in a cycle of feeling bored and overwhelmed. The adventure was there, literally all around me, and I was ignoring it.

The same can be true of community too. How often do we view the people in our lives as burdens rather than blessings? Now, surely, people can be *difficile* – that's just French for difficult, but some people are so difficult they need another language. And we laugh at that stuff, sure, but how often is their supposed difficulty actually more about our refusal to deal with conflict in a healthy way, about inability or unwillingness to confront the differences that we have, to engage in genuine relationships and seek to make everyone better, to help us each become more authentically ourselves? Instead, we just write them off and cast them away.

And goodness, do we need courage in this world. When I say courage, I don't really mean the kind of courage that it takes to go to war, where you're fighting an enemy that's different from you. I mean the kind of courage that it took my friend Barb Brown to fight the cancer in her

pancreas, because that enemy is you. So often we want to ignore the things that are wrong with us, to blind ourselves to those things that want to pervert us or distort us, and so we let them pervert and distort us by virtue of not confronting them. But there are people like Barb who show us what Eden's courage is all about. When they found the cancer, it already had metastasized to her pancreas. With a doctor as a husband, we all knew the prognosis wasn't good, because Barb's body was fighting a losing battle against itself, rogue cells that sought to end her life.

Rather than give up, she embodied courage for 14 valiant months, facing the tumors with determination. She held her grandchildren with a grip that pulled every ounce of life possible away from the enemy in her own body. She would not let the nakedness of her cancer define her or shame or let it separate her from her loved ones. She died, but was not defeated, for her courage would not allow

shame or fear win the day. She commissioned an entire family into a new life of supernova courage, the kind that explodes with light and life and existential meaning. That's so rare in our world today, that glimpse of Eden's life, where Barb's courage brought her closer to her community and led her into an adventure, living all of the life possible in those 14 months. That's the image of God at work in our world, not Barb's strength on her own, but that original strength of Eden, opened to us all by God, that she took hold of because she believed in Eden more than she believed in death.

Saints like Barb who reveal to us God's glory even amidst such desperate circumstances are incredibly rare in this world because of sin. When we talk about sin this way, we aren't talking about simply breaking rules and shaming people into behaving in ways that make us more comfortable. Sin, at it's core, is the rebellion against our

identity, against our nature, that God gave us in creation. Sin's work to separate us from Eden is real, but it is not irreversible. Some theologians refer to the work of sin as total depravity, and this name can be a bit deceiving. Properly, this doesn't mean that we are totally and irreparably broken, as though we're unrecognizable as God's images. Instead, it means that every part of us is affected by sin. Sin's broken every one of the pieces, but they can be repaired. Imagine it this way. Total depravity would be like every piece of your computer breaking. The case, the screen, the keyboard, the touch pad, the motherboard, the hard drive, the charger, but they're all fixable. It's not as though they've been pummeled into dust by a sledgehammer, beyond recognition and repair. We can still tell it's a computer, and there's someone – a computer engineer – who can fix the problem as well.

Our lives created in God's image are very similar in this world. Every part of us is affected by sin, but that doesn't mean we're unrecognizable as God's images. We're still called to a life of adventure, of community, of courage, but it no longer comes naturally. Because of the brokenness, it's not as easy as it once was in Eden. Yet, in Jesus we see someone who found adventure in the ordinary, whose life story we find in the day to day journeys of a group of regular, first century Jews. We see someone who embraced the community around him, even when they were selfish like James and John seeking power, even when they were arrogant like Peter telling Jesus he couldn't possibly go to the cross, even when they abandoned him like Judas when he turned Jesus over to the authorities for thirty pieces of silver. And while Jesus' only reported nakedness was on the cross, he lived a sort of naked life, for in the Gospels we see a man living life fully alive, fully authentic, never hiding his

true self out of fear but bearing it even to the point where others killed him for it.

But oh, the glory of the resurrection, for that means that rather than death killing the adventure, silencing the community, and suffocating the courage, Jesus tore those things out of the grave's death grip and returned them to us, that we might grasp on to Eden, and onto our identity as creatures created for God's purposes, once again.

The question for us is this: Can we find Eden's adventure in the ordinary? Can we embrace the community that God's given us, even through the pain of losing part of ourselves? Can we have the courage to face our nakedness?

The answer is yes, but not on our own strength. It is on the strength of the Spirit who raised Jesus from the dead, the Spirit that came into us in our baptisms, that brings us together with Jesus each week in communion. That Spirit

opens to us the adventure, the community, the courage intended for us in Eden. This will not feel natural at times, but remember, that's the lie. The pain of community is sometimes losing part of yourself, maybe even a rib, to give life to someone else. The adventure of creation sometimes means searching out what's new and in need of a good name. The courage of creation means we can look sin, and fear, and cancer, and a whole host of other things in the face and say: you don't define us. Our God's done that already, and we're being remade in that beautiful, wonderful image every single day. That's the first taste we have of ReCreation, of seeking what we were intended to be and how God restores that potential to our identity.

So, in that element, receive this benediction: Find the adventure of Eden in your everyday lives. Embrace the community God's given to you in its difficulty and its delight. Commit to courage, diving into the world authentically

naked in your identity as a child of God. That's who we're meant to be. Amen.