

“A Mighty Fortress Is Our God”

Genesis 1:1—2:4

In our Old Testament reading, we were privileged to hear the entirety of what we can assume was the first book ever written and the introduction of the second book ever written. The book we call Genesis is really a compilation of nine books handed down through the generations which Moses took and redacted (he edited them) and put them into the form we know today. After the first book, which tells of the six days of creation, each of the following books begin with the Hebrew word “Toledoth” – “these are the generations.”

The second book begins, “These are the generations of the heavens and the earth.” If you ever wondered why the book of Genesis tells the story of creation twice, this is why.

Continuing on, we hear of the generations of Adam, of Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Esau, and Joseph. So the first three books pertain to Adam. But our focus today is not on the first Adam, but on the Second Adam and how He pertains to the Father and the Holy Spirit.

It is the Sunday of the Holy Trinity and, in the first verses of Scripture, God presents His three persons in one God. “In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.” God the Father is the architect of the universe. Yet, we are told in John’s Gospel that “through Christ, the Son of God, all things were made.” That is, He is the One who spoke the universe into existence. He is the One who said, “Let there be light.”

And as this was happening, “the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters,” and it was good. Then, when God says, “Let us make man in our image,” that is further emphasis that God is three persons. In the Hebrew language, there must be at least three of something for it to be a plural. “Let us make man in our image.”

But in those words, “Let us make man in our image” we see something more. When God created Adam, it wasn’t like the other living creatures. He said, “Let the earth sprout vegetation.” And it was so. The earth brought forth vegetation. He said, “Let the earth bring forth living creatures according to their kinds.” And it was so. And the earth was filled with plants and animals.

But man, Adam, was made in the image of the Triune God. The animals brought forth from the earth have some similarities to us in that we all need to eat, to drink, and have the drive to bring forth another generation. But we have so much more, such as the opportunity to serve others and thereby serve God. The opportunity for worship, as we have been given knowledge of our Creator.

All throughout this week of VBS and in the weeks leading up to this, I was amazed at the creativity and artistic skill of God’s people. Beyond our ability to create and build, the very fact that we can communicate with one another in deep and meaningful ways sets us apart. We are not animals mooing or barking, running on instinct, and simply seeking our next meal.

Sadly, those who have not known God, or who have rejected Him want to say that we are just another animal. First of all, to put it in St. Paul’s terms, if we were only concerned with the things of the flesh, and not the things of the spirit, we would miss out on so much of the good things in life, not to mention how disastrously that affects the life to come.

This is not a new reality. The philosopher Epicurus lived around 300 BC. He basically taught that man was simply made to eat and drink. Martin Luther even references him in his lectures on the Book of Genesis. The followers of Epicurus loved his teaching that happiness is freedom from anxiety. So, “Don’t worry, be happy”; “If it feels good, do it.” There are a lot of Epicureans running around our world today.

Our modern “thinkers” (and I use that term loosely) from the so-called Age of Enlightenment (beginning around the year 1700), loved Epicurus because he challenged the existence of a good God. If God is willing to prevent evil, but not able, then He is weak, feeble, not much of a God. Is he able, but not willing? Then He Himself is evil. If He is both able and willing? Then why is there evil and suffering in the world? Philosophers call this “The problem of evil.” It is a favorite argument of the haters of God.

Throughout the generations, the nature of God has remained unknown to man, even the wisest of the philosophers have remained ignorant of Him. Yet, He reveals Himself to little children. God is willing and able to deal with evil. Where the philosophers, going all the way back to Epicurus, get it wrong is that they do not understand the true nature of God. And the Enlightenment Age “thinkers” and the “if it feels good, do it” Epicureans of today have simply rejected the reality that God is both willing and able to deal with evil in this world, but not in a McDonald’s drive-thru mentality. We want to order it up and have it ready immediately.

God’s answer to evil comes in the second book ever written, which is introduced with the words, “These are the generations of the heavens and the earth.”

We are told in that book of how Adam sinned, and lost the image of God in which he was created, and God immediately promised to send a

Savior, His Son, to be the Second Adam and to crush the head of Satan – thereby giving us victory over sin and death. Thousands of years pass, and then Jesus Christ comes. Victory is ours. Evil has been defeated. God was willing and able to deal with the reality that His creation, which was very good, had been ruined by the man who was the pinnacle of His creative work – Adam.

What the philosophers will never understand is the depth of God's love for Adam and for Adam's children – the willingness of God the Son to depart the joy of heaven to suffer for the sake of others, to be crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men. Jesus had to come as the Second Adam to defeat sin, death, and Satan.

All during this week of VBS, our focus was on the Gospel, specifically Jesus' victory over sin, death, and Satan. And how, as the Psalmist says, God is our refuge and strength. He is our Mighty Fortress – that was our theme throughout the week. We ask the common Lutheran question, "What does this mean?" It certainly does not mean "Don't worry, be happy." Happiness is not freedom. Being in Christ is freedom and life and peace, and absolute security for our future in the safety of our Mighty Fortress.

We read in the first of the nine books of Genesis that the Triune God – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – began with a plan, and it was very good. The intention was for Adam and his children to be with God forever. In the second book, Adam disobeys God and brings sin and death into the world, but God still has a plan. And it is very good. It is still His intention for Adam and his children to be with God forever. "God is our refuge and strength." A Mighty Fortress is our God. Amen.