

The 14th-century mystic theologian Julian of Norwich once held in her hand a hazelnut. As she pondered it, she wondered how it could exist — how it was that this hazelnut was held together and didn't just crumble away. And as she looked at it, pondering, she heard an answer:

*It lasts and ever shall, for God loves it. It lasts and ever shall, for God loves it.*

Our scripture today begins the same way our gospel reading began last week. Last week we heard from the Gospel of John; this week we hear the creation account from the first chapter of Genesis. Both begin with the words "in the beginning." In the Gospel of John, we learn that in the beginning was the *Logos*, the Christ. In Genesis chapter 1, we learn that in the beginning was God, the Creator.

The story of creation forces our attention onto the act of God as creator. It doesn't introduce us to a God who simply sits back and watches the world. This is a God who actively works at taking what was chaos and giving it order. But in the creation narrative, we are also introduced to the breath of God — the *ruach*, the Spirit that rushes over the chaotic waters. So between the Gospel of John and the account of creation in Genesis, we have our Trinitarian formula: God as the Creator, God as the *Logos*, the Christ, and God as the breath, or the Spirit.

Creation offers us profound theology about God. But it does more than that. It doesn't just tell us about the nature of God — it tells us about the *ecology* of God. It shows us that in creating, God is deeply intertwined with everything. That you cannot understand God simply as the act of creation, but that in every aspect of creation you can see reflections of these different aspects of God.

We see that creation is not simply the handiwork of God, but rather that God is interconnected with all creation in ways we can't always easily explain or quantify. So it becomes our truth that we can say we see in the budding flower the Spirit of God at work. We can say we hear in the rush of the waterfall the voice of the Creator. And we can say that in the fluttering of a butterfly's wings we witness the inbreaking of the Christ, the *Logos*.

This is what we're talking about in this season of creation — those intersecting ways in which we encounter the presence of God. But today, maybe we don't just think about the presence of God. Maybe we think about the *belovedness* of creation.

If we read about creation and only understand God as present at the beginning, we do God a tremendous disservice. If we think of God as simply setting up the systems we live in and then taking a hands-off approach, we miss the full story of what it means to see God in creation. God is not creating dispassionately or carelessly, not simply setting something up

for us to receive. God is acknowledging, in the act of creation, the beauty, the wonder, and the goodness of what is being created.

The whole narrative is a reminder of something I think we may have lost — I blame the Enlightenment, personally — but somewhere along the way, we lost the idea that God displays emotion. You can see it throughout the Old Testament if you read it. You can see God having emotion. In the life of Christ, you can see God having emotion. And yet I think a lot of times when we think of God, we're tempted to imagine a being of pure logic who doesn't experience the same kind of emotions we do.

And yet in the narrative of creation, we see God as an emotional being — that God has, perhaps, the primal emotions we experience. God creates and sees goodness in what has been created. If that is not an emotional response to creation, I don't know what is. God's emotional response tells us that creation is good. Creation is sacred. Creation is beloved of God.

If you look at Genesis 1:28, you'll find some of the more challenging words in the creation narrative. God creates humankind in the image of God, and like the rest of creation, God has that emotional response to the creation of humankind: God says humankind is good. And then God gives humanity dominion over creation.

And I'll tell you — in the name of dominion, we've tamed the wilds. We've paved over ecosystems. We've disrupted and destroyed. We've reshaped the whole of creation to suit our needs, and oftentimes we have done that without a thought to God's belovedness of it.

Rabbis Yonatan Neril and Leo Dee wrote a book called *Eco Bible*, a commentary on Genesis and Exodus in which they look for the ecology of God present in the text. They notice something interesting: the Hebrew word for "dominion" appears to be a kind of play on words. In Hebrew, "have dominion" is *u'r'du* — and they suggest it echoes the word *yeradu*, "to be brought down" or "taken down." *U'r'du* — dominion; *yeradu* — to be taken down.

In their reading of this wordplay, they speak of humanity's responsibility to creation — and that all the times we fail in that responsibility, we get taken down a little bit ourselves: through insect infestations, disease outbreaks, wildfires, or floods. Our dominion is a responsibility to care.

Although, as I sat with this text this past week, I had another thought — perhaps "dominion" has another intention entirely. What if part of that responsibility is to see creation the way God sees it? To see the belovedness of what God has created? To have that same emotional response God seems to have toward creation?

Because I think too often, when we look out at creation, we don't do it with an emotional lens. We look at it for profit, or as something opposed to us. What if dominion is asking us to see creation as God sees creation — as a place of goodness, a place beloved? What if we are being asked to have the emotional response that God has?

Our creation story comes to an end on the Sabbath day. After all the labor of creation, God establishes a day of Sabbath rest. And the Sabbath is not named "good," as the other acts of creation are. Instead, the Sabbath is named holy and blessed — a set-apart day of rest, a day to remember.

One of the themes of the Sabbath in rabbinic law is that it's not simply a general day of rest — it is a day to rest from our *own* acts of creating, because we are a creative people. We get that from our God. I think we get the need to create and recreate things in our own image, sometimes, from that same source. What if the Sabbath is an intentional day to stop creating, and instead to notice what God has created?

There are thirty-nine categories of work the Jewish people are prohibited from on the Sabbath, and those thirty-nine categories were drawn from the labor needed to build the tabernacle. Remember, when the Israelites were wandering in the wilderness, it was in the tabernacle that they had the presence of God — it was in the tabernacle that they worshiped. And on the day of rest, they were instructed not to do the work of building the tabernacle.

I wonder if that wasn't meant to remind them that God could not be confined to a single space — not a tent built in the wilderness, not a church built by human hands. What if it's not to say that God *can* be confined to a single space, but to slow us down enough that we can appreciate that all of creation is beloved of God — that God is present in all parts of creation? And that sometimes we need to step back from the work of creating, building, making, doing, so that we can truly appreciate the presence of God in the belovedness of creation.

I do wonder if that Sabbath day is echoing that same voice Julian of Norwich heard — *why does this last? Why is creation worth preserving? Why are we called to do the work of finding the belovedness in creation?*

Maybe we hear the same voice Julian heard all those centuries ago: *It lasts and ever shall, for God loves it.*

Perhaps today we slow down. We hear that voice, and we remember the belovedness that surrounds us.

Let us take a moment to pray.

*Holy God, what thanks we have to give to you — that not only do you name creation as beloved, but you include us within that belovedness, and that in creation we see your sacredness in all things: as the Creator, as the Christ, as the Spirit infused into all that surrounds us, reminding us of the sacredness in which we live. I pray in Christ's name. Amen.*