



Grace Space – Touchpoint for May 31, 2023

Genesis 1 (NRSVA) ¹ In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, ² 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. ³ Then God said, “Let there be light”; and there was light. ⁴ And God saw that the light was good ...

⁹ 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. ¹⁰ God called the dry land Earth, and the waters that were gathered together he called Seas. And God saw that it was good.

¹¹ 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. ¹² 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 ...

¹⁴ 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” ... ¹⁵ And it was so ... ^{18b} And God saw that it was good ...

²⁰ 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.” ²¹ 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 ...

²⁴ 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. ²⁵ 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.

²⁶ Then God said, “Let us make humankind 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, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.”

²⁷ So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.

²⁸ 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.” ²⁹ 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. ³⁰ 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. ³¹ God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good ...

Grace and peace from the Mystery in whom we live and move and have our being.

“Then God said, ‘Let us make humankind in our image’ ...
And it was so. God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good.”

The biblical story begins in chaos. The world is without form and void. It's a mucky, gunky, swirling swamp of yuck. And yes, those are highly advanced theological terms that four years of seminary taught me.

The Hebrew phrase is 'tohu wa bohu.' It's one of my favorite bible phrases. "Tohu wa bohu." I don't know why. It just floats off the tongue. The word 'wa' means 'and.' So it literally reads, "Tohu and bohu." Chaos and meaninglessness. Yucky and gunky. It doesn't just refer to the physical form of something, but its function as well.

Life can be yucky, both physically and relationally. And so, when you've had a bad day, or a bad week, it would be appropriate to say your tohu and bohu are acting up.

"Hi. How ya doing?"

"Not well, my tohu and bohu are acting up."

That should raise a few eyebrows!

So, the world is full of tohu and bohu. Chaotic, meaningless, yucky and gunky.

And what does God do? God creates a place, a space... of goodness and grace. In the midst of the chaos and meaninglessness of life, God creates a space, a place... of goodness and grace. Seven times, if I counted correctly, God creates and then sees that it is good. And the last time, after God creates us humans, God sees that it is **very** good.

I want you to think about that. God's first word – first observation about you – is goodness. God's first word to creation, to you, is a word of grace. Grace is not something added after the fact. Grace is not something given after you mess up. Grace is not a patch on the pants of failure.

Grace is at the core, the beginning of creation. It is inherent in creation. It is inherent in you. We don't have original sin in us. We have original goodness. We have original grace.

To put it in computer language: Your "default is not your faults."

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Goodness and grace are our origins. Our foundations. Our defaults. Your "default is not your faults." But it is all too easy to forget that, and too easy to feel bad about ourselves. There are rules. There are expectations. There are mistakes, and we make them. We learn so quickly that we are capable of **doing** wrong, and that turns swiftly into an idea that we **are** wrong.

We see disapproval, we sense disappointment, and we carry it in ourselves. And we quickly turn from seeing that we've **done** something unacceptable to thinking that we **are** something unacceptable!

I don't know why, but we slide down into that pit fast, and then we get stuck there. And we spend so much of our time, our energy, and our theology trying to get out. Because we think that is our mission in life.

To get back in good with God. But I want to ask you this: If God created you good, then what do you have to be better at?

Nothing. Nothing at all.

Now let me be clear. Are there things you and I can be better at doing? Yes. I can be better at exercising and eating habits, obviously. I can be a better friend. But I'm not talking about things you and I do. I'm talking about who you are in the eyes of God. If God has declared you good, then what do you need to get better at?

Nothing. Nothing at all.

The only progress you need to make in your life of faith is realizing you don't need to make any progress. Be the goodness you are. Be the goodness God created you.

Let that sink in.

What difference would it make, if when you look in the mirror in the morning you don't ask yourself, "What must I get right today?" But rather, "How will my goodness come out today?"

What difference would it make, when you walk into a situation, if you don't ask, "How do I be right?" But rather, "How can the goodness, the gifts God has given me, be helpful?"

Now sometimes the answer to that may be, "They can't." Sometimes you are not the one to help things. And that's ok, too. Look, I've been in churches that wanted help in singing. And I simply told them, "Trust me... you don't want me thinking I have a gift that can be helpful with that."

I've been in relationships where my presence seemed to be more of a problem than a solution. Sometimes we may not have the gifts to bring about healing and wholeness in a specific situation... and that's ok, too.

But think about it. What difference would it make in your marriage, or your friendships, if at the end of the day instead of trying to figure out who was right or wrong, you spent time trying to figure out how you experienced the goodness and grace of God from the other person?

Goodness and grace are our origins. Our foundations. Our defaults.

You were created good. VERY GOOD. You were not created 'lacking' anything. You were not created 'not good enough' or in 'total depravity.' You were not created to pass a test, or to prove to God or the world you are worthy. You were created 'VERY GOOD.'

Rest in that. Live FROM who you are. Don't try to live FOR something. Don't try to live for approval or acceptance. You were created VERY GOOD! Live and love others knowing they were created very good as well.

That's the starting point – the genesis – for how we see ourselves and others. If we start from the point of total depravity in ourselves, and especially in others, then we will think it's okay to step on the necks of our brothers. We will think it's ok to see our sisters as second-class. We will think it's okay to call people on the other side of the political aisle 'deplorables.' And we will build economic, cultural, and political systems to separate people out. To draw distinctions rather than commonality. To demonize rather than divinize.

But to start from the point of you and I being made in the image of God, and you and I being made very good, is to see that there is hope in the midst of the chaos in this world. And to see our responsibility not as stomping down on what we define as the depravity of our neighbor, but bringing out the Divine image in which they were formed.

The Hindus greet another one another and say “Namaste,” which means “The Divine in me recognizes the Divine in you.” To put it in Genesis terms, we would say “The Divine image in me sees the Divine image in you.” Or to put it in New Testament and Pauline terms, “The Christ in me honors the Christ in you.”

You know, kind of like, **“I was hungry and you fed me. I was thirsty and you gave me drink.”** Instead of seeing the depravity of the person, we see Christ in the person. And hopefully we won’t reply, “When did we see you hungry or thirsty?”

And why, as Christians, should we above all others be able to see this?

Because in the night in which he was betrayed, our lord Jesus took bread and wine and said, *“This is me,”* and put himself inside of us. And the next day we got to see **‘Christ in Jesus’** as he hung from the cross. And we got to hear his word of forgiveness as he honored **‘Christ in us’...**

... In the midst of the chaos of this world. All the tribalism and riots. All the neck stomping and gunning down. All the political theater masquerading as reality.

In the midst of the chaos of this world, we take time out to proclaim that there is not only a goodness, but a VERY GOODNESS. And it is not only in the spaces around us, but in our brothers and sisters...

... AS WELL AS OURSELVES!!!

So, if you’ve spent your life trying to get back in good with God... If ‘tohu’ and ‘bohu’ have left you feeling detached, disconnected, dis-membered from the goodness and grace of God... If you think your default is your faults...

Then you’ve come to the right place, the right space.

Here, in this meal, you will be reattached, reconnected, re-membered. To the goodness and grace of God. To the goodness and grace you were created and are.

Amen.

Spirit in the Desert

Opening Song

Be Still

(London Fox Taizé Choir)

Be Still, know that I am God.

Calm Me Lord

(Margaret Rizza)

Calm me Lord as you calmed the storm.
Still me Lord, keep me from harm.
Let all the tumult within me cease.
Enfold me Lord, in your peace.

Bible Passage

(A passage takes us from one place to another)

Touchpoint

(Where God's story touches our life story)

Come Drink of Living Water

(London Fox Taizé Choir)

Come drink of living water. Never thirst again.

The Meal

The Lord's Prayer

(Monastery Choir of St. John of San Francisco)

Benediction

The Lord Bless You and Keep You

(National Lutheran Choir, Peter C. Lutkin)

The Lord bless you and keep you.
The Lord lift his countenance upon you... and give you peace.
The Lord make his face to shine upon you... and be gracious unto you.
The Lord be gracious unto you. Amen.