

A CALL TO INNER ABUNDANCE

Genesis 1:1-2:3

One of the problems that has developed in our modern world is a division and disconnection between our inner, individualized selves and our outer relationships with the world and the creation around us. Such division and disconnection has led to our alienation and abuse of our earth, as well as creating a gap between those of us who have more than enough and those who have little to nothing. We have all this technology that connects us with one another like never before, yet we are more divided, disconnected, alienated, isolated and alone like never before.

What the opening story of the bible teaches, and this teaching is extended throughout the scriptures, is that we cannot find our fullest abundance as creatures before God and in the world within ourselves alone. Unless our relationship with the planet is healthy, caring and generous, we will undermine the fullness and abundance we can experience in life.

So how do we shift our relationship with the world so that we contribute to greater abundance for others and experience greater abundance in ourselves? The opening story of the bible – Genesis 1 – can help us. Let me draw out several insights:

1) God as the one creator of all versus the sun, moon, stars, oceans, etc, as gods themselves or even various gods controlling things like seasons, harvests and all things in creation. The vision behind multiple gods is a vision of a world fragmented and conflicted. God as the one creator provides a different vision of order, harmony, structure and the move towards integration in the midst of chaotic forces, collisions and conflict in nature mimicked by human beings in conflict with one another. The vision of one God as creator also provides a unifying purposefulness in the universe rather than the view that all is just random and chance and therefore inconsequential.

1. Our inner abundance seeks order, harmony, structure, integration in a time of chaos, disintegration and being pulled here and pushed there...
2. our inner abundance also seeks purpose and meaning in a world of randomness, chance and a free play of forces of cause and effect outside our control...

2) Everything created and everything that exists is good. Evil can only be like a parasite or disease that undermines, compromises, corrupts and destroys what is in essence good. The greater the value placed on what exists, the greater the evil of it's corruption, disregard and abuse. This contradicts any view of the world as containing evil in persons, creatures or nature itself. If everything is good in itself, it cries out to be cherished, valued, protected and redeemed. We need to heal the evil and corruption in ourselves and our world so that it's goodness can flourish unimpeded.

1. Our inner abundance has to include a commitment to protect what is good and 'tend the garden.'
2. Our inner abundance has to include a commitment to root out and eliminate the toxins that erode and destroy the good creation.

3) Purpose of creation – God saw everything God had made and it was good, and behold, it was very good... The Hebrew word for good is 'tov' and the ancient Greek translation of *tov* as *kalon*, suggesting not just moral goodness (good as opposed to bad or evil), but also 'beauty.' Beauty has delight in it and pleasure as motives. God doesn't just experience creation as morally good, but beautiful. Beauty takes you places beyond yourself. Looking at a beautiful piece of art, listening to a beautiful piece of music, looking at a beautiful sunset or mountain range, you forget yourself. You experience transcendence. We need goodness but we also need beauty. God is an artist who is creative and God delights in what has come to be. In fact, God is so delighted that God is almost surprised by how good it all is, which is what a genuine experience of beauty evokes – surprise!

1. Our inner abundance must find purpose as creatures created in God's image: to experience delight, to behold the beauty and goodness of creation just like God does, and to act accordingly to protect it and care for it. We don't neglect or abuse that which we find profoundly beautiful.

4) created in God's image – to 'subdue' and 'have dominion'...

1. To subdue is actually about helping bring order out of chaos and harmony out of conflict, just like God does.

2. To have dominion is to have responsibility for creation which is also accountability before God. How have we been handling our responsibility for creation? What happens when we remove God out of the equation and become little gods ourselves? Dominion becomes domination and subduing becomes conquering and controlling other life so that it becomes something we use for our gratification and comfort without thought to what is good for other life itself.

5) Sabbath – need to create space and time in our lives in contrast to what this world is doing to us... Our slavery to busyness and the division between our inner and outer worlds have caused our alienation from creation with dire consequences for our planet.

1. Sabbath is about getting grounded again in experiencing delight in the beauty of creation. To do this well we need time to contemplate and worship as well as time to be in creation itself. Worship and contemplation renews our vision and focusses our attention so that we know how to approach the world around us, cherish it and commit to caring for it to find our inner abundance. It also inspires us to make sacrifices to restrain our technological appetites so that the earth may breathe and regenerate.

Amen.