

IN THE BEGINNING...

Genesis 1: 1-5, 20-2:3

In my early days doing ministry, I discovered something about myself. I was a fixer. What's a fixer? A fixer is someone who wants to fix things. A fixer wants to help people heal and grow, find happiness and peace. A fixer wants to help people resolve conflict. A fixer wants to repair what's broken or appears to be broken. A fixer wants to save and rescue those who are hurt and suffering. But does this work? It may work with a broken toaster or computer. But what about people? Do people need fixing? Or do they need something else even more?

Well, I discovered soon enough that for all my efforts to fix people and their problems, I experienced frustration and failure. Rather than appreciating my efforts, some people got upset with me. This only created resentment and frustration in me. Didn't people want to be helped? Were they not prepared to do what needed to be done when that was clear? And to make matters worse I was also accused of not really listening. I felt like a failure with some key people who were core members of the congregation.

So what did I do? I realized soon enough that if I couldn't overcome my resentment and frustration and find a way to love my people instead of judge them, ministry would not work out. And so, I did some introspective work. I came to discern that my tendency to be a fixer came from anxiety and fear. Fixing things and people was about control and domination over problems. If they couldn't be fixed in the church and by me, how could people believe that God could fix their problems and heal them? What difference could I make as a minister if I couldn't give people a God who could fix their problems the way a doctor, lawyer or mechanic could?

Well, thankfully, with the support and help of my people, I came to discover another way of being with others, a way far more profound and transformative than being a fixer. It was a growing challenge for me and still is. But part of this learning for me had to do with God as well. How we see ourselves and what we believe about God are interconnected in case you hadn't picked that up yet. The way we believe healing, wholeness, change and transformation can happen says a lot about how we believe God works, how prayer works and how we are called to be within the depths of our being outwards. What do I mean? Let's dive into our scripture reading...

The book of Genesis has been read for thousands of years. But it has also been misread for thousands of years. Without realizing it, we bring all our experiences of life into our reading of scripture. We also bring all our longings and fears into our reading of scripture, and our conceptions and misconceptions also. And all of this is then projected onto our ideas of God and what God should be like. We then pray to this God of our own making, seeking to get more of what we want without any larger perspective or self-criticism as to whether such longings and fears turned into ideas are worthy of ourselves or the God we are seeking.

OK preacher, so how is this relevant to our reading of Genesis and our scripture reading in particular? Well, for thousands of years, the common way of reading the opening chapter of Genesis is by zeroing in on verses 26-28: "Then God said, 'Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over all creatures of the earth... God blessed them, and God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it...'" So, preacher, isn't it obvious what this all means? We humans are the crowning achievement of creation. Our purpose is to fill out the earth, to dominate, control, use it and shape it to the purposes of our flourishing, to make it as we want it because what we want is good.

And God must be exactly like us, only projected onto the massive scale of ruler over the whole universe. God is us and we are God and God is all about power, control and domination. Creation needs us to survive and thrive. Creation needs us to control and fix all that is imperfect or broken according to our measure of it. Without us there is no future for the planet. Just as God controls the whole universe, we as God's special creation are designed to control planet earth.

OK, so how has that reading of scripture worked out? Where are we at today? From arrogant colonial powers going into other countries to civilize or fix them by domination and control, to us trying to shape the world as we want it and now having to try to fix all the problems in the world we have created, to all the devastation of mother nature we are the primary cause of creating... the image of God as domination and control is a failed image, a false image, an idol of our own creation. The image of God the fixer is a projection of our fear and anxiety, and unless we change that image, our planet is doomed.

OK, preacher, but isn't domination, control, fixing and subduing what Genesis chapter 1 is telling us? No, it is not. And in order to hear a very different word here, let's step back and listen more attentively to how the God we are supposed to image is described.

1) First of all, in creating the world, God does not dominate, control or micro-manage it. Every time God creates we are told God begins by saying: "Let." "Let there be light", "Let the waters bring forth swarms of living creatures", "Let the earth bring forth living creatures of every kind", and finally, "Let us make humankind". "Let..." means there is freedom in the creation God is making. Even as there are rhythms and patterns and necessary, predictable instincts in creatures, no two rhythms, patterns and behaviours are exactly the same. Just as there is diversity of being built into creation, there is an openness and diversity in what happens and can happen. God is not interested in communing with a creation God will control or fix according to some image of perfection imagined somewhere. Even as there is order out of the chaos and structure out of the formless void, there is openness, freedom, randomness and chance built in because this is what makes for rich and meaningful interaction and communion, for love. Beauty, unpredictability and mystery all go together and if every choice, movement and outcome is determined where is the art, the wonder, the passion, the love and the joy?

2) But this brings us to point number two. At the end of every day of creation, God steps back to behold what has been created like an artist steps back to see what has come to be in the creative process. And we're told that God sees what is created and it is "good", and "very good." In modern English, good is an adequate word but not terribly exciting. But the word translated as good in ancient Hebrew is: "*tov*" and in the earliest translation of Hebrew in classical Greek, it is: "*kalon*". *Tov* and *Kalon* give depth and richness to the word "good." Parallel words would be: spectacular, gorgeous, awesome, magnificent, breath-takingly beautiful. God steps back from what has been created and God is blown-away. In fact, God is so overwhelmed by the beauty of it all God is speechless and establishes the seventh day as a day of rest to take it all in! Wow! As much as creation was thought through by God, there is a lot of surprise for God in what comes to be and the seventh day is like a creative add on not planned ahead. Yet seven is the number of a completeness to be celebrated. We know something is complete and just right after we experience it and not before we accomplish it.

So then, there is a letting be, a freedom and openness in the rich diversity of creation, and there is a stepping back, even a seventh day devoted to resting and enjoying the spectacular beauty that is creation. God is in love with this creation that has come to be. Rather than make it all out of some pre-determined plan, creation is a creative process where there is lots of freedom for things to be and become in ways open and undetermined.

OK, so what about the dominion and subduing part? Are humans supposed to dominate and subdue the rich diversity, the freedom to be and become of creation? This is where we have to rethink the traditional reading of the creation story. Rather than a love for the beauty of life which grows out of freedom and trust we have seen all that's different as a threat, as something to be fixed, dominated and controlled. Think of what we're doing to the planet, what we have done with indigenous peoples and what we've done to women and queer folk and anyone who hasn't fit the mold of those with the power and privilege.

OK, so what if the dominating and subduing is what ancient peoples have had to do to survive on the land, in the forests and the plains? Cultivating the land to farm and grow crops, domesticating animals and hunting are a necessity for human survival. In fact, if humans weren't created on the 6th day, would the rest of creation suffer all that much? Probably not. The rest of creation goes with the ebb and flow, the freedom and the necessities of creational life. It's we humans who need to tame the land and the animals in order to survive.

And what if we changed the word translated as "dominion" to: responsibility, and the word "subduing" to words like: farming, gardening, growing and domesticating? And what if we really focused on the image of God we're supposed to live into as described in the creation story, a God who delights in a free creation and loves its beauty because God takes the time to behold how spectacularly good it all is? God does not dominate, control or subdue it, nor is God interested to fix it since it is already spectacularly beautiful.

OK, preacher, you've given us lots to think about and absorb here. How is this relevant to your tendency to be a fixer? Well, I realized that fixing problems and fixing people was about me and my own anxiety and fear not about the people themselves. I realized that I had to behold people as precious human beings. I made a commitment to myself. Unless I could truly see the beauty in the other human being I was engaging, I had no right to get involved in "helping" them. Unless I was prepared to listen without acting, listen without talking unless I was asking for clarification or providing assurance and encouragement for them to keep sharing; unless I was prepared to just be with others and find goodness in that, I could never be an effective minister or spiritual healer. It had to be about them first, not me. Only once I was able to enjoy their humanity could I then reclaim mine, not as a fixer, but as a fellow human being, vulnerable like anyone else, and together on a journey with God above, beside and within, open to what the energy flow of healing love could do in their lives as much as my own.

So, did it work? Have I succeeded? I've certainly grown. I've grown to love and enjoy people, but I've also grown to recognize how vulnerable and imperfect I am. The two have gone together. The more love for others grows, the more I am able to accept myself and receive the love God has for me too. I am ministered to by others to whom I am also ministering. I am reclaiming my humanity by seeing and enjoying the humanity of others, even when they are in profound pain. I see their brokenness even as I recognize my own. And through all this, God is more real and more present than ever: God the healer, God the creator and re-creator, God the energy flow of love; Amen.