

- **Creation & New Creation**

Sunday, September 10, 2023 at The First Congregational Church of Marshalltown, Iowa

Genesis 2:7 And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being.

2 Corinthians 5:17 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.

- **Introduction: Rosh Hashanah**

This Friday marks Rosh Hashanah, the beginning of the civil New Year in the Jewish Calendar. First mentioned in Leviticus 23:23-35 and it marks the beginning of the Holiday season. According to tradition, it was on Rosh Hashanah that God created Adam and Eve, so with that in mind, I thought that we would take a few minutes to consider Creation, particularly creation of people and that human life is not mere accident. How does that influence how we look at life, and at the lives of other people as well as our own?

- **Genesis-breath of life**

In Genesis we have the account of God creating all things in chapter 1 through 2:3. In 2:4 through 2:7 we have, I believe, not a competing or second account of creation but a special project to secure a special and sacred place for the finishing act of creation. The first verse in the passage is as follows: "This is the history of the heavens and earth when they were created and the day that the Lord God made the earth and the heavens." "Earth," in this verse has a very broad meaning. It can refer to the whole planet, a continent like Australia, a country within a continent, a large estate or something even as small as a garden, though I suspect the garden here envisioned is larger than a standard vegetable garden. Rabbinic commentary lists this as the Garden of Eden, set aside for a sacred event, the creation of humanity. God forms man out of the dust of the ground (note that Eve is made out of a rib and is thus more refined than man, who is made of dirt) and breathes into him the breath of life.

- **dependant upon God**

I want to focus on that phrase, "the breath of life," and particularly the word for "breath." It means, literally, "puff," and can mean the breathing that is distinctive of animal life but can also mean intellect or divine inspiration. The verb underneath it means "to blow" and can imply wind that blows things away and causes destruction. I found that interesting, as if that passage is implying that to grow in intellect and in knowledge and experience of God, we need to be willing to let go of other notions and ideas that need to be "blown away." Sometimes the next step in growing as a person and as a child of God is to acknowledge that we're wrong, need to learn and be willing to say "I'm sorry" and learn anew. There is a built-in statement that this breath is God's and that everything, even our ability to breathe, take in oxygen, think and live is dependent on the Lord, and if I read the Book of Hebrews correctly, that holds true for every single moment of our lives. We are that dependent upon God.

- **yet made to be creative**

Yet Adam and Even were created in a garden and were set free to make something of that Garden, something of order and beauty, something that God could walk through and enjoy. I think that the Garden, among other things, can serve as a symbol of our lives. God is sovereign, totally, yet we have freedom to make something of the garden of our lives, make the most of what opportunities

that we have and to see what we can do that would be productive use of our days. We should always be working on ourselves, learning, growing, appreciating each new day as best we can.

- **2 Corinthians-**
creative in a garden, but also in the gardens of other people

But that view of our lives, that of working in a garden-working on ourselves- is broadened by the New Testament statement of Creation. It's one of the most startling verses in the Bible, "if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation." I remember a professor, wonderful man, whose PhD. thesis was on the phrase "in Christ." It was 500 pages long, but the basic meaning was that someone who was in Christ was under His influence, referring to followers, students of Christ. It is both individual and communal, as the phrase "he is" is added by the translators to make the verse follow English grammar. The literal translation is "if anyone is in Christ...a new Creation." It is the same New Testament word for the Creation of the World. The "garden" here can symbolize our lives, but also the lives of others. We work on ourselves to properly invest in the lives of others, to encourage, to help them grow as they do for us as well. I remember reading an article in a magazine about gardening in Europe, in particular the way a neighborhood would coordinate their gardens. One person would grow nothing but cucumbers, another green beans, another strawberries, etc. Everyone invested in their own gardens, their own lives, with an eye toward being able to better invest in the other gardens. Everyone ended up with an abundance of a variety of fruits and vegetables and no one had too many cucumbers. That is an imperfect image of the New Creation life.

- **Conclusion**

If you remember, take a few minutes this Friday to reflect on Rosh Hashanah, the beginning of the Jewish Civil New Year (there are more than one "Jewish New Years"). It remembers Creation, particularly the Creation of Adam and Eve and it shows us our dependency on God and our freedom to make the most of our lives. The New Testament corollary, about the New Creation in Christ, widens our focus to invest in each other's lives as well as our own, so that all may grow together. That is already happening, and I see signs of it. When the VBS needed a long list of donated foodstuffs, they received all that they needed. When worship ends, people stay and talk. That's a good sign. When there was a call to clean up the grounds there was a good response. That's a good sign of people who invest in their own gardens and are willing to invest in each other's garden as well. That's evidence of New Creation life in a church. Pray hard. Work on yourself. Continue to invest in others.