

More than words

The story shapes our soul

Revealing God

Most cultures have creation stories. The creation stories of Genesis are etiologies. Etiologies are stories that tell how things began or what caused them. We learn why snakes crawl on the ground, why childbirth is hard, and why labor is often fruitless. In the Cain and Able stories, we learn how cities and city dwellers began. In the Tower of Babel story, we learn why so many languages exist.

It is possible that these stories share deep roots. Other cultures have stories of floods in their creation stories. Other cultures share creation stories where waters are separated and dry lands created by a domelike structure, which is created by splitting a monster in two. In the same story, humans are created from the blood of another god monster.

While these stories have similar themes, one great difference emerges. The picture of God revealed by the Genesis stories shows us God who actually cares for creation and human beings. In other stories, the gods are not so caring. In one story, the gods destroy humanity because they make too much noise and the gods can't sleep. In another, humans are created to be exploited by the whims of the gods. They are toys to be manipulated and abused.

While the idea of God destroying humanity might be difficult for us, the Genesis stories continually show a god who loves and cares for creation and its creatures. God gives Adam and Eve clothes. Cain receives a mark that keeps him from being killed. Noah gets a rainbow. In all these stories, the image of God is one of deep love for humanity and creation. The Genesis stories tell a deeper truth of God who wants a loving relationship with humanity. It is in the image of this God that we are created.

They also tell another story – our story. Throughout the Genesis stories, we hear how humanity keeps trying to replace God's image with our own. We give up a relationship with God to have a relationship with ourselves. Adam and Eve want to be like God. Cain kills Abel. The people try to reach the heavens, and the world rejects the Creator God.

All of these stories foreshadow another story – the story of Jesus. His story is the story of God reaching out to a world living in its own image. It is the story of God who empties God's self to be born one of us. Through him, God would restore creation to the order God intended. Love and compassion would rule. The last would be first. Those who would rule would serve. The ones who would be greatest would be the least. It really isn't the story the world wants to hear.

Things to ponder this week:

- What Genesis story is your favorite? What lesson do you think it teaches?
- What in the Genesis stories surprises you?
- How do you reflect God's image in today's world?

(Thoughts provoked by weekly devotion by Brian McClaren, We Make The Road By Walking.)