

**In The Beginning**  
**Rev. Dr. Kim Engelmann**  
**West Valley Presbyterian Church**

Be they theist or be they atheist, on this most scientists agree:

In the beginning there was nothing.

There was no time, space or matter.

There wasn't even emptiness, only nothingness.

Well, nothing natural anyway.

And then, **BIG BANG!** Everything.

Nonexistence became existence.

Nothing became, in less than an instant, our inconceivably vast and finely tuned universe governed by what we would later call - after we too popped into existence from nowhere, fully armed with conscious awareness and the ability to think, communicate and observe - "natural law" or "physics."

Time, space, earth, life and, finally, human life were not.

**And then they were.**

The overwhelming consensus among scientists, whether they believe in God or deny Him, is that the "Big Bang"

moment of singularity is the only feasible explanation to account for the universe

and everything in it.

## **THE STORY TELLS US THAT**

### **In the beginning God...**

That's the first four words of our Bible.

### **That's how THE STORY begins**

In the beginning God...

The first cause, the one who fashioned the intelligent design of all that is, (that scientists are still discovering) the being who is uncreated life – the source of life itself

In the beginning there was God

A God who was pre-existent,  
a God who is not bound by time, a God who always was, a creative God, a God with a plan  
God existed in the beginning

That's how the STORY starts

Vince Lombardi started coaching his team by getting back to basics. Gathering them altogether he said, "Gentleman this is a football"

Sometimes its good to get back to basics

THE STORY starts with the first and only premise for the dawn of creation

When there was no us...no world...there was God

That basic...that profound...that real

In the beginning God....and the next word is a verb

And it tells us what's to come...and it tells us what kind of God this is

In the beginning God....**CREATED...**

**BANG! BIG BANG!**

How many of you have ever visited the Sistine Chapel? It's the official residence of the pope in Vatican City.

Michelangelo painted 12,000 square feet of the chapel ceiling between 1508 and 1512.

The ceiling is his crowning achievement in painting, and it draws millions of visitors every year. (PICTURE OF CHAPEL)  
They come not for the architecture of the building or anything to do with its exterior.

Rather they come to look at the ceiling, and in the center of the ceiling they see creation happening; the way Michealangelo painted it was God reaching out to Adam (PICTURE OF THIS)

This picture, the two hands, the two fingers which are almost touching is perhaps the most famous painting of all time.

The “Adam” in Hebrew actually means humankind  
And God is still reaching out to humanity today  
Because  
We have an “I want to be with you” kind of God  
Who created us in love, and who pursues us today out of passionate fiery love

This is the story of that *I want to be with you* God - creating a world that he deeply loved and found good– BIG BANG!

So God creates...and we found out in the next verse that God creates the heaven and the earth...

Here is how it happened as God spoke these things into being...here it is in a nutshell:

- DAY 1: Light and darkness**
- DAY 2: Sky and water**
- DAY 3: Land**
- DAY 4: Sun, Moon and Stars**
- DAY 5: Birds and Sea Creatures**
- Day 6: Animals and human beings**
- Day 7: God rested**

In this creation there is order and wonder as God speaks these things into being.

Before there was darkness and chaos.

Now there is a beat to creation, a system that is organized, a synergy, an order.

That is why Genesis is written the way it is.

Do you hear the order, the symmetry of the text.

There's almost a beat to it And God saw that it was good...Evening and morning...first day...And God saw that it was good..Evening and morning...second day.

The text itself in the way that it was written is showing us the order and synergy and beat of creation that was spoken into being at the dawn of creation.

I want you to appreciate the academic effort that went into writing this first part of Genesis. Yes there are similar stories from pagan culture, including creation and the flood account. But Genesis is unique in the following ways:

First off, **God interacts with his creation** – he is not interacting with other gods in the sky as so much of pagan literature depicts things

Second, **God is a benevolent being**. He speaks the world into existence but there is not a hint of authoritarianism in the original text of the creation account.

God is a gracious, powerful being, completely sovereign, and yet desiring our free response to his abundant gifts which he gives liberally desiring our grateful response.

There is a gentility and a deep respect for his creation that is embedded in God's nature, and it comes out when you read the text carefully... we don't see this in other early sources.

Now let's look at the process of creation – and let's just say that the creation account had stopped on day 5 - creating the universe could have been enough to tell a pretty good story. (show creation days)

We could stop on day 5.5 and have a story all about the stars and galaxies. That in itself is really quite enough. It's a huge deal.

In 1966 astronomers focused the Hubble telescope on a small and utterly black patch of space right next to the Big Dipper constellation.

They left the shutter open for 10 days. Do you know what they found? They found 3,000 more galaxies.

In 2004 they left the shutter open again focusing in on the constellation Orion. They did it for 11 days. What did they find? 10,000 more galaxies.

Scientists tell us that today there are more than 1 billion galaxies in our universe. The vastness of space boggles our minds, doesn't it? This could have been a story about galaxies.

You could read through Genesis 1 and think that the point is the creation of the universe – God's really big science fair project. That's why we have this Bible – to be dazzled by the universe.

But NO.

This is a story of you and me, and our relationship with this vastly powerful, and at the same time extremely personal benevolent Creator.

Because it is so clear in the text that God's crowning achievement is the creation of people.... Not the billions of galaxies... that wasn't God's ultimate idea. Rather, God's ultimate achievement in creation is us!

You can almost feel God's heartbeat getting a little faster, as he says on Day 6 – (Let's look at **Genesis 1:26-27**)

Then God said, "**Let us make people – humankind - in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals,<sup>[a]</sup> and over all the creatures that move along the ground.**"

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

Did you catch that? Were you listening closely. **“Let us...”** The wonder of the Trinity is expressed here. **“Let us...” Father, Son and Holy Spirit. “Let us make man in our image”**

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

Up until now, at the end of each day of creation God had said what?  
**“It is good”**

Now, with the creation of man and woman, God says, **“It is VERY good.”**

Ever notice that before?

Do you need a boost for your self esteem?

Then Read Genesis 1 every morning.

Lots of times I wake up in the morning, look in the mirror and say,  
**“This is not good.”**

God looks down on us and says, “This is good. This is very good.”

God is saying that you are more valuable and beautiful to him than the grandest mountain peak or the most beautiful flower. You are of more value to him than any galaxy or constellation of stars.

Over you God says This is **very** good

I know some of you don't feel that way. Some of you think you have no worth or value. Someone somewhere told you you were not of value.

But are you going to listen to what people tell you or what God tells you here in Genesis?

God's passion is you. You are the crowning achievement in the creation.

God's passion is for human beings. And you are of great value to him.

So God creates man and woman and He places them in the Garden of Eden. Clearly ***the destiny for us is to live in God's world not a world of our own making.***

We are destined to be a part of God's story in other words, not the other way around...

Open the front cover of your copy of The Story and you will find a map.

Look on the right side and find Babylonia.

See the two rivers, the Tigris and Euphrates and see where they come together.

It is right near the city of UR. Put a little tree right there to mark a possible location of the Garden of Eden...right in modern day Iraq actually.

God places them in that garden and then we read in THE STORY that God was walking in that garden in the cool of the day with them.

Go back and think about those galaxies that we mentioned before.  
**God is bigger than those billion galaxies and yet God is found walking in the Garden on this tiny planet in 1 of those billions of galaxies.**

So do you get it? The Story is not so much about a God who is way out there but The Story is about a God who comes down here, whose supreme passion is to be with us – even in the Old Testament...way at the beginning of time...

Notice also that it is only to human beings that God speaks, in the creation account

You see we are called to *a different kind of relationship* with our Creator than any other part of creation is.

There is an intimacy with God that we are created for and a depth and a meaning that all comes from God speaking to us, and us listening and responding.

*We were spoken into being, with the rest of creation but it is only to us...human being that God continues to speak; and today his voice is still speaking, and he is still creating new things for us if we listen to his voice .*

The power of Gods speech in creation John picked up at the beginning of his gospel when he calls Jesus “the Word become flesh”



**“In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God....The Word became flesh and dwelt among us full of grace and truth.”**

– and he plays off the creation narrative beautifully...that just like God’s word, the word from his mouth created the world he says that now in Jesus Christ we are a new creation.

Now I have to move on here to what has traditionally been called **the FALL** or what we might call **BIG BANG #2**. The human beings whom God loved more than anything else, the ones he chose to communicate with, he created with free will.

So for instance I love Tim. He has been an awesome husband. But Tim can’t force me to love him. I do so because I choose to love him...and I want to do that. If Tim had to force me to love him, or I had to act as if I did when I didn’t, it wouldn’t be love.

God’s nature is love, and love forces no one. It is Gods nature not to force, or coerce, or manipulate, or control.

It is in God’s nature to create, to pursue, to communicate/call, to woo, to sacrifice selflessly...but not to force, or intrude.

God created human beings to love him, and to be loved by him. But because of his nature – God is love and he can’t deny himself - he also had to create humans with the freedom to choose against him... such is the nature of love. Love desires a free response.

And we know what tragic thing happens next don't we?

WE could call it **The Tale of Two Trees** ...Theres the Tree of Life and the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil.

And God says, here you are in this beautiful garden with all kinds of things to munch on. But just this little tree over here...its kind of spindly anyway. – it's the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Don't eat from this one. Any other one is fine.

So Gods sets up a choice for Adam and Eve so that they could choose for him freely.

However, they take the loophole and choose against him. **BANG!**

And the serpent says to Eve, “***...when you eat of the tree your eyes will be opened and you will be like God, knowing good and evil. Genesis 3:5***”

So many times in life we are confronted with that same kind of choice. Usually, the choice isn't a matter of not knowing right from wrong. We usually know right from wrong. The choice is whether we are going to do what we think is best when God says that what is best for us is something we don't like.

Dad says no to the little kid and the little kid throws himself down in a tantrum. What do they say? “BUT I WANT TO!”

God says, "Don't drink yourself into oblivion" and we say "BUT I WANT TO"

God says, "Don't sleep around." And we say "BUT I WANT TO"

God says, "Don't steal from customers to increase the bottom line," and we say "BUT I WANT TO"

Or it can go the other way

God says, "Worship me on Sundays regularly" and we say, "I don't want to"

God says, "Give some money back to me – say 10%" and we say "I don't want to"

God says, "Go and share your faith with a friend," and we say "I don't want to."

We have free will to do as we please. But our actions – when we choose against God – sever us from the Glorious Creator who knows far better than we do how we ought to live our lives. What the best choices are. He created us. You think we'd listen to him. We have a hard time surrendering to God's will sometimes. We have a hard time not being God.

Adam and Eve made themselves God because they put their own will over against God's will.

And that intimate, close, beautiful, serene and joyful relationship with their Creator could no longer exist.

And in being separated from God, after they ate of the tree that they weren't supposed to eat from, Adam and Eve saw their nakedness and they were ashamed.

Shame is different than guilt. Guilt says, "oops I did something wrong. I feel badly, or guilty about it."

Shame says, "There is something deeply wrong at the core of who I am."

And that deep sense of wrongness came when Adam and Eve were severed from that intimate relationship with God that they were created for. They were naked without God...

The entire rest of the Bible is about God seeking his lost children, agonizing over their sin, and recklessly, passionately, adamantly going to bat for them, and finally sacrificing himself in Jesus - so that all people everywhere could be forgiven through the blood of Jesus, and brought into close relationship with him again. – just like it had been in the Garden at the beginning

Some people think that God sewing animal skins together (the first death ever recorded in the Bible) to cover Adam and Eves nakedness (which is extremely gracious by the way) is a foretaste of Jesus – the lamb of God being slain – to cover our sins...our nakedness...our shame.

That's what we have before us at this table. The Lamb of God, the Creative Word of God himself become flesh – both priest and victim – friend of sinners- pursuer of the lost the broken and the downtrodden – sacrificed on a cross – the worst form of torture. That was his free will to reconcile what our free will destroyed...

The Creator of a billion galaxies plus came to us once again...here on this small planet at a certain time and place in history...and offered himself freely, liberally and eagerly so that you and I can have fellowship with him now today and for all eternity...don't take this lightly

This is the STORY and its still going on. God is still pursuing us, and pursuing his creation. He is still doing a creative work, speaking into lives, changing people, making disciples.

I teach at a little seminary in Oakland and one of my students shared his story with me. He was very poor, getting into trouble, going the wrong direction and one day he just decided to pick up the Bible and read it. No pastor, no mentor, no friend encouraging him. And the word of God did a creative act in him and he told me he met Jesus in the pages of the Bible all by himself one day; he is in Bible school

today because of THE STORY. The Word of God still creates, and woos us to himself...

This book is the greatest love story in all of history. “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son...” (PRAYER/TABLE)