

In The Beginning...

When God had created the world, he called together all the living creatures who were waiting to be born. As yet, they all looked very similar to each other, as they were still embryos. There they all were stretched out in front of Him, a seething, excited mass, waiting for the great moment when they would be set loose in the new world. Eventually silence fell as they stood before the Creator. And God spoke.

“As I look at you all, and as I look at everything else, I can see that it is all good,” said the Almighty. “Today you are to take your place on the Earth and know the joy of life. But before you go, I offer each of you a gift; ask me for something that will help you in some way, something which might make your life better. Whatever you choose will be for you and all your descendants. Ask, and you shall receive.”

This caused a great stir among the creatures as they realised what was being offered. They talked amongst themselves; they thought; they considered; and they pondered. Ideas were chosen and then rejected, then chosen again. After some time God spoke again.

“Who will be first.”

“I will go first,” said the embryo of the lion, small and pink. “Please God, I would ask for strong, sharp teeth and claws, and the ability to hunt.”

“So shall it be,” said God. And it was. The embryo of the lion changed into what could be seen as a baby lion. “Who is next?”

The bat stepped forward. “I would to be able to fly, and also be able to see in the dark. “So shall it be,” said God, and so it was.

One after another the animals came forward and chose. Some chose strength and things to help them hunt. Some chose speed. Some chose incredible defensive gifts. Soon each of them had chosen; all, but one. The Human had said nothing.

“What about you?” said God, “What can I do for you?”

“Well,” said the human, “I’m finding it all a bit hard. There is so much to choose from; so much would be useful, I really don’t know what to pick. I look at myself at the moment and I see my puny arms and legs, my soft skin. I see my weak teeth and instead of claws I have these fingers and this odd thumb thing. So much to change, so hard to know where to start! I’ll tell you what God,” the human sighed, “I don’t want to appear rude, but I think that I might not actually choose anything. I think that maybe you knew what you were doing when you made me, so I’ll leave it at that.”

Silence fell over all the creatures, who wondered at the stupidity of this creature. And then God spoke again.

“Well done, Human. You chose well. You will become what I intended you to be, something in my own image. You will not have claws or teeth or speed of armour.

You will not be able to fly or live under water. But all of these things, and much more, you will be able to do using what you have now. You will rule the earth as my Steward. I give you everything.

And thus it was.

The first few chapters of Genesis are about the human condition; we hear the description of what we were created to be, and then we hear the description of how we rejected that. Various stories are flung into the pot to show that humanity is unable to accept what it is; it wants what it thinks is more - but turns out to be so much less!

The key to the whole thing, as ever is the story of creation. God creates, and He creates in the way He wants; it is good. Everything works, and works together. Things are as they should be.

(It might seem that the theory of evolution might be a problem: if God created things as they should be, then why would things evolve? I would suggest that change, development, is part of creation; God does not seem to want things to be static but to move on - just as creatures are not born as fully formed adults, never to grow old; they change and develop over time, experiencing new ways of being in different conditions. In a sense, creation is a continuing process. This is an interesting discussion, but it is not really the subject matter of Genesis!)

For the Genesis story, the creation of Humanity is the pinnacle, and not just because it comes last. There is, in the story, a recognition that humanity is different. Humanity is made in the image of God. Humanity shares divine attributes. Now, let's be clear; that does not mean that humans are Gods or even gods with a small 'g'. One of our problems is that, so often, we think that we are! No, not gods but sharing in God's work, reflecting God. I really don't know how much higher we could be, how much greater honour we could have. In the proper world of creation we know that we are created; we know that we are to serve the Creator; and we know that we are as the Creator wants us to be.

But, as we know, it doesn't work. I suppose that to create humanity in His image, God has to allow for the possibility that humanity can choose to go wrong: to be perfect, perfection must have the possibility of imperfection built into it. This is free will. Think of it like this.

If I were to love someone, desperately love them, I would want them to love me back. Imagine that I lived in a kind of Harry Potter world of magic and I could get hold of a love potion which, if I gave it to my intended, would cause them to love me desperately. That might sound great! Maybe, for a while. Eventually I might start realising that they don't really love me; it is only the potion. Would that satisfy me? Probably not. I would, I hope, if I really loved the person, want them to love me, want them to really love me. I want my love returned from choice not by force. So, loving someone, and wanting them to love me, must involve the possibility of them not loving me. Without this possibility, the love is not real. Imperfection must be there to have perfection!

It's Not Rocket Science

A good thing to do at this point is to pause and look at the divine job description for humanity found in Genesis 1:28-30 and 2:15. Be fruitful and multiply. Have dominion¹. This is not rocket science. Of course, that does not mean that God does not like rocket science. Or painting. Or music. Or comedy television. But these are what could be called hobbies, giving interest to life; things to be developed, nurtured and enjoyed. But they are not the core job. And, notice that God does not say that we will grow into job description; that we will need further training before we can begin. The assumption seems to be that we are created to have everything needed to do the job. Maybe we will learn, and get better; but everything necessary is there from the start. We cannot plead that we need more time, that we are not ready. We cannot say that because we have no degree in theology that we cannot do what God wants. We were created without theology degrees. We cannot say that we are too stupid; too fat; too ugly; too delicate; *too anything* - to do the work of God. To do so is to insult God - to tell Him that he made a mistake in His creation, and that it was just not good enough.

Of course, that is exactly what humanity does say. Think about the symbolism of **Genesis 3:7 (and 2:25 in contrast)**. Why are they ashamed - or afraid? Why the sudden need for clothes? It can't just be because they had suddenly discovered their 'naughty' bits - they had been around before, and must have been fully functional! In fact, is this when they become 'naughty' bits? It's almost as though the humans are not happy with the way that God has created them - it's not good enough.

Now, before this interpretation is thrown out, consider modern people, especially in the west. Here is a quote from The Australian newspaper in 2013:

"Thirty thousand liposuction procedures, 8000 breast augmentations, about \$1 billion spent on cosmetic surgery annually. These might sound like figures from the US, where cosmetic surgery has become such an obsession that women are having home-DIY grade silicone injected into their buttocks for the "J.Lo effect", resulting in several deaths. However, these are Australian figures and they're on the rise."

In the same year, the people of the USA spent \$12 billion on plastic surgery.

People are not happy with the way they look. They can do better.

Of course, the question that we should be asking about this is "What are we judging ourselves against?" The answer is not, it would seem, against the desire of God. It seems to be against each other. We spend our lives furtively looking at each other, worrying about our acceptance by each other. We fear. So we try to change things. We want to be gods, but we are not very good at it!

¹ Never forget that this does not mean "treat the rest of creation like slaves to do your will and make life good for you". It goes back to the Image of God. Rule the Earth as God would rule; be His stewards.

For Discussion:

- What does it mean to be human?
- What does the perfect human look like?
- Is there, honestly, anything that you think that God got wrong in creation?
(Before you refuse to answer this question, recognise that part of being made in the image of God is to have the ability to question. Also recognise that as humans, we cannot know everything!)
- When we judge ourselves, by what standard do we do so - honestly?
- Have a look at **Psalm 139 13-18**. What does this say about us and how we are made?

Prayer:

Almighty God,
You have created the heavens and the earth and made us in
your own image:
teach us to discern your hand in all your works and your
likeness in all your children;
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who with you and the
Holy Spirit reigns supreme over all things, now and for ever.