

Yarrow, December 13, 2009

Ps 148:1,2
 Hy 1A
 Ps 33:1,2,3
 Ps 146:3,4,5
 Hy 9:1,2,3,4,5
 Genesis 1:1-23
 Matthew 6:19-34
 Lord's Day 9

Beloved Congregation of the Lord Jesus Christ!

Lord's Day 9 is about "God the Father and our Creation". That topic automatically sends our thoughts to the distant past, to the time of Genesis 1. That mental travel in turn drives a wedge between the material of this Lord's Day and our specific circumstances today. For what, we wonder, has 'long ago' got to do with 'today'? As I struggle to make ends meet, as the children insist on *that* pair of shoes (twice the price, of course), as I'm trying to sort out what I need to think about all that talk about climate change and the meeting in Copenhagen, what value has a Lord's Day that wants us to think of God's act of creation so many thousands of years ago?? Isn't that just too remote from today?

It is true, congregation, that Lord's Day 9 takes our thoughts back to Genesis 1. But we have to notice that that is not where the first accent in this Lord's Day lies! Rather, this Lord's Day would lay a finger on our circumstances *today*. Look at the first sentence of the answer. If you peel away all the clauses and the sub clauses, you are left with this sentence: "the eternal Father of our Lord Jesus Christ ... *is* ... my God and my Father." "Is", present tense: you can't get more here-and-now than that! With this Lord's Day we're saying –while our hands are dirty with the grit and grim of *this* life– we're saying that we have a Father.

How God became our Father we can leave to one side for now. Fact is: for Jesus' sake He established His covenant of grace with each one of us in our infancy, so that today He is our Father and we are His children. The bigger and pressing question on our mind today is this: *what kind of a Father is this God?* In a very unbelieving and very materialistic world, what value, what comfort, what instruction is there in knowing that your Father is none else than the world's Creator?

I summarize the sermon with this theme:

OUR GOD MADE THE WORLD IN WHICH WE LIVE.

1. The majesty of the Creator,
2. The comfort for the creature,
3. Our care for His creation.

1. *The Majesty of the Creator.*

Today our eyes see the paint and the drywall and the wood of this building, and shortly our lips will savour the Sunday cake. Tomorrow our eyes shall see the huge pile of laundry and the bills the mailman brings. These are all earthly things, things that fill our minds, demand our attention, drain our energy. But the Lord would not have these things be the focus of our attention. He Himself made this world, with everything in it that we see and hear and taste and smell. All of it, the Lord would have us know, speaks of Him, tells His glory. That is to say: creation reveals who the

Creator is, and it's on him our eye must be focused – if we are to receive any comfort in the rush of this life.

How, you wonder, does creation reveal the Creator? According to Genesis 1, God created the world, and did so by His Word of command. “God said, ‘Let there be light; and there was light.... So the evening and the morning were the first day.’ Again, “Then God said, ‘Let the earth bring forth grass...’; and it was so.... So the evening and the morning were the third day.”

Question. When God commanded the existence of light, how long did it take for the light rays to appear? When God commanded the earth to bring forth grass, how long before clover covered a given space of ground? We are accustomed to answering those questions with, “Instantly.” To justify such an answer, we appeal, eg, to Ps 33, where the Holy Spirit has the psalmist say concerning God's work in creation that “He spoke, and it was done; He commanded, and it stood fast” (vs 9). Instant.

But we live, brothers and sisters, in today's world. Our world has embraced the theory of evolution, and so the notion that this earth evolved over a space of billions upon billions of years. Last week I mentioned that this evolution theory has no place for God; evolution assumes that God does not really exist. That puts the evolution theory at opposite poles to Christianity, for Christianity insists that God does exist. But did you know: there is also a half-way position between the evolutionists and the Christians? This half-way position says: the Bible tells us that God created the world, but doesn't give us details on how He did it. Genesis 1 isn't, we're told then, a literal account of how God formed this world, but is a poetic account meant to teach an uneducated people (that would be unscientific Israel) that all the world comes from God's hand. But, this half-way position continues, science has learned that the world has existed for billions and billions of years, and that over the span of these billions of years plants and animals evolved from primitive matter to the complex organisms we see around us today. So, says this half-way position, we're driven by the discoveries of science to conclude that the Lord God created this world *by means of* the evolution process. This teaching is called Theistic Evolution, a phrase that translates to mean: God-driven evolution. So, says this teaching, we have to understand that the Lord God determined to make light, and in the course of millions and billions of years the light God wanted evolved to the point as it exists today. Similarly, God determined to make grass, and in the course of millions and billions of years grass evolved from initial single-celled living matter into the clovers and rye grasses we know today. What happens, then, to the 'day' of Genesis 1? Each of the six days of creation, Theistic Evolution says, were in effect ages of millions of years, certainly not the normal day we are used to. And when Ps 33 says that God “spoke, and it was done,” we're to understand that God uttered His word of command and took millions of years in making it happen.

What do you think, brothers and sisters, of this teaching? That question is important because there are churches around the world who call themselves Bible-believing –some even have the same confessions we have– and yet leave room for or embrace this Theistic Evolution. Do you think this teaching agrees with God's revelation? And: does this teaching influence daily living?

There are a few things that need to be said in reply. In the first place, the Lord God uses the word 'day' various times in the course of the Bible. It's very obvious that the term 'day' in the gospels describes a normal day, as we are used to it. And the fact of the matter is that the Lord Himself does not give any indication that we are to understand the term 'day' in Genesis 1 as different from the customary. If He yet meant something different than the normal understanding, would that not mean that we couldn't take God's words at face value? If the word 'day' in Genesis 1 means something different than the common understanding, does the word 'resurrection' later in

the Bible also mean something different than we expect? You see, Theistic Evolution questions God's integrity, questions whether God actually says what He seems to say.

In second place, if God created the world through a process of evolution, what does this say about the power of God? Picture the Lord God giving a command for grass to develop, and then sitting back for millions of years while grass slowly evolved. Contrast that with the picture you get when you read Genesis 1 at face value, with God uttering His command that there be grass, and presto, there it was. Or, "Let the waters abound with an abundance of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth..." and instantly it was so. There was no grass, no fish, no bird; God spoke, and they were there, a field of grass flowing in the breeze, trout and salmon and dolphins cruising through the water, robins pulling worms out of the ground, juncos fluttering in the trees. We understand: the second picture puts the majesty and power of God very much *in your face*. "He spoke, and it was done; He commanded, and it stood fast" – what a God! No wonder the angels of God burst forth into songs of praise on the day of creation! (Job 38:7).

There's another aspect of God's identity at stake here. Evolution would have us understand that animals and plants change with time. The changes, it's said, result in improved species. But the changes that happen, of course, are not only good changes; the bad mutations die out – survival of the fittest. Now, if this evolutionary process is God-directed, it is God who directs both the good and the bad mutations, that is, makes the ones that survive and the ones that don't survive. It's a picture of God making mistakes, of trial and error – and over the span of millions of years God gets it right so that today's world is populated by the species that exist. What picture, congregation, does that present of your God? Is the God who would comfort you with the gospel of creation really a God subject to trial and error? Would you feel safe in the hands of such a God? We realize: that's certainly not the picture Scripture gives of this God!

In the third place, if God created this world through a process of evolution, where does death come from? And sickness? And sin? Is death part of the natural world as God formed it through evolution? As apes became humanoids, and those early humanoids became Adam and Eve, did those ancestors of Adam and Eve die off?? Could they get a toothache, break a bone, become sick? Why I ask? Because the Bible teaches not just that Adam and Eve had no parents (let alone monkeys for parents), but teaches too that Adam and Eve lived in a Garden of perfection free of toothaches and broken bones and sickness. They knew no fighting, knew only the peace that comes with being friends of God. But they rebelled against God, sinned, and so brought sickness and grief and death into the world. My point: if you dispute the reality of Genesis 1, you must dispute the reality of Genesis 3 also. But if Genesis 3 is not real history, why must Jesus Christ come into the world? And why did Jesus Christ do His miracles of healing the sick and raising the dead if there's no connection between sickness and death on the one hand and the fall into sin on the other? You see, an effort to merge creation and evolution affects much more than just Genesis 1; it affects the entirety of the Bible and the need for the gospel of redemption.

You will say: but the evidence of science is so clear that the earth is obviously much older than the 7000 or so years the Bible suggests. That may indeed be so. But then there's two things to bear in mind.

The first is: human conclusions, even scientifically done, can by definition never be guaranteed to be 100% accurate. Human work is always *human* work.

Secondly, if you had met Adam walking in the Garden in the first week after his creation, would you have mistaken him for a newborn? We realize: God created Adam as a mature man. The same is true for the dog and the horse and the lion that lived with him in the Garden; they were

mature animals, able to multiply. For the sake of the argument, that big tree over yonder in the Garden didn't look like a seedling; it had 200 rings. But if Adam and his dog and his trees were mature at creation, why could the world not be mature at creation – complete with gas fields and fossils and leached soils, etc?

You see: the critical question in the discussion of theistic evolution is this: *who do you think God is?* Is He big enough to create in an instant? Or is He a God that needs time, very much time, to get things right? More, is He able to make a mature world that scientifically looks much older than it is? Who is God?!

That question, of course, congregation, touches our personal lives directly. The Lord God established with each of us His covenant of grace, so that today He is our Father and we are His children. But: *what sort of Father is He?* Is He a mighty God, so great that He uttered one word, and the grasses of the field and the birds of the air came instantly into being as we see them today? Or is He a small God, who needed millions of years with trial and error to perfect the grasses and birds we see around us today?

2. *The Comfort for the Creature*

Is the question important? Ours is a world of much anxiety. The whole climate change thing scares the bee gees out of people, so that they think that some form of natural Armageddon is coming. Then there's the economic meltdown of a year ago; that too contributed to people's sense of insecurity, vulnerability. Then there's the Fort Hood shooting last month, an event that has tentacles all the way back to the Middle East and the Muslim faith and the Osama bin Laden.... In a world of anxiety, of change, of distrust and betrayal, we confess that the Creator is our Father, our Father is the Creator. Is there sufficient encouragement in His identity to comfort us in anxious times? *Who really is this Creator that's become our Father?*

The Lord Jesus Christ answered this question for His disciples. I refer now to the last part of the passage we read from Mt 6. Jesus was outside, addressing His disciples in the Sermon on the Mount. He tells them how to manage their worry and stress. What they have to do? No, not go skiing or take a holiday. Instead, vs 26, they have to "look". Look at what? "Look at the birds of the air." For all I know, as Jesus was speaking to His disciples on the mountain side, there were seagulls from the lake nearby floating on the breezes. But Jesus' point, of course, applies to us in our backyards too, and the chickadee in the tree. Where did that seagull of long ago, that chickadee of today, come from? There was a time when those birds weren't there. God spoke, and there they were, perfect birds, the descendants of which sit on the fence today.... How do they know how to build a nest? How to feed their young? How to fly? Jesus' point: see there *your God!* "The heavens declare the glory of God," and so do the birds that fly through the heavens. God spoke, and it was done, He commanded, and instantly it stood forth. With *such* a God as your Father, Jesus asks His disciples, are you not safe, completely safe? *See in creation who your Father is!*

And to impress the point on His disciples the Lord also told them to "consider the lilies" growing yonder. The disciples were to look at them, and they were to place themselves under the instruction caught in the shape and the colour and the beauty of those lilies. Lovely orange petals curved and shaped just so, with that black line running up the middle of each petal, and the pistil up the centre of the flower, and if you look long enough you see a bee coming along to feed in the flower. Where did that lily come from? It wasn't there, then the God who has become your Father spoke, and presto, it was there – ancestor to the plant in front of you now. Solomon had his seamstresses working day in day out to make for him and his family garments worthy of royalty. But

God in a moment dressed up that lily more beautifully than Solomon's favourite daughter could ever be dressed. What a God, to make something so precise, so beautiful, at a word! You see, creation reveals the Creator, draws out the majesty and power of the God who has become your Father for Jesus' sake!

If *such* a God is your Father, why be anxious? Will He not care well for you? Should I be anxious because of what terrorists might do? Should I be worked up because of what my doctor tells me? Shall I be afraid of climate change? Or of government policy in response to the fears that come with climate change? "Be anxious about nothing," says the Lord, "but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus" (Phil 4:6f). Your Father made the birds, and made the cotton in the laundry pile. He made the flowers, and He made the paper on which your bill is written. *And all these parts of His creation spell out His greatness and His majesty!* Lift up your eyes then on high, to the Creator-who-is-your-Father-for-Jesus'-sake. By showing you His creation He would give you so much comfort.

There's another consequence that needs our attention:

3. Our care for His creation

If this world, brothers and sisters, was fashioned by the hand of our God so that it's *His* world, shall we abuse and destroy it? If our Father in Jesus Christ would show us His majesty and care-for-us through the world He lets us see and hear and smell day by day, shall we misuse it, devastate it? The answer is so obvious.

Caring for the environment is such a big topic in our day. It ought, congregation, to be Christians first of all who need to be in the forefront of the argument to take care of Planet Earth! Equally, your neighbours need to see that you respect animals and plants and the environment as a whole – and of course know from you why you care for the world. This is your Father's world, entrusted to your care!

This affects lifestyle. I can mention throwing food away because we prefer the taste of something else. But somebody produced the food and transported it to Chilliwack, and that took energy – and I shall now garbage it? I can mention using the car when walking or biking works just as well. I can mention upgrading to a bigger house which costs more trees to build and more energy to heat – while the one I have is perfectly suited to my real needs. I can mention travelling abroad for the sake of travelling abroad when a local holiday will also satisfy. The list goes on and on. No, we need not revert to living in a shack or having no comforts, but at a minimum moderation is in place. Exactly because this is God's world I shall not waste nor pollute unnecessarily. That is simply Christian stewardship that belongs to God entrusting His creation to our care.

Sunday by Sunday each one of us confesses with the church of all ages that "I believe in God the Father almighty, Creator of heaven and earth." With that confession we acknowledge where this world came from and who the God is who has become our Father in Jesus Christ. Since this world belong to our Father, we'll care for it well – and daily confess that in the hands of such a God we're perfectly safe, come what may.