

Gen. 1:1–2:4a

Ps. 8

2 Cor. 13:11–13

Matt. 28:16–20

God, the Creator

Goal for the Session

As adults engage with the familiar account of God's work in Genesis 1, they will explore ways to encourage others to be stewards of creation.

■ PREPARING FOR THE SESSION

Focus on Genesis 1:1–2:4a

WHAT is important to know?

—From “Exegetical Perspective” by Richard Boyce

There is a multiplicity to God's revelation in the world, which even (or especially) this opening prelude makes clear. The God of Scripture is just too big and mysterious and communal to allow a single subject (*'elohim*) to drive a series of verbs (create, said, see) that thereby describe this deity as *simply* a single actor over against the creation this particular God brings about. The spirit or wind of this God is also an actor; the spirit “sweeps, hovers, and broods” over the stuff of this world in a way that hints at relationship—both inside and outside the Godhead this passage portrays.

WHERE is God in these words?

—From “Theological Perspective” by Melinda Quivik

This text offers the theological question of the value of creation. Out of nothing, something was made (*creatio ex nihilo*). Why is this important? The Creator's first pronouncement is that the creation is good. The goodness here is not an aesthetic or ethical proclamation about the nature of light; rather, goodness concerns the use to which it can be put for God's intention. We do not learn what that purpose is in these verses, but God is pleased. The light is “good.” God names it.

SO WHAT does this mean for our lives?

—From “Pastoral Perspective” by Carole A. Crumley

One significantly different understanding of the Trinity comes from Meister Eckhart, a fourteenth-century German mystic. He wrote that God the Father laughed, and the Son was born. Then the two of them laughed, and the Spirit was born. When all three laughed, the human being was born. For Eckhart, the mystery of the Trinity was surrounded by peals of golden laughter at the heart of the universe. What does your experience tell you about the Trinity? How would you describe the indescribable, incomprehensible mystery of the Trinity? Trust your spiritual heart to know the way. It is the only compass you need.

NOW WHAT is God's word calling us to do?

—From “Homiletical Perspective” by Dave Bland

What confirms God's special love for humans is that they are the only ones made in God's image (1:26–27). This is one of the reasons God insists on Israel not making images of the God they worship. God's image is already placed within humans; no other kind of representation is necessary. As God's image bearers, male and female are given a responsibility: to have dominion over the created order (v. 28). Humans are given dominion, not domination; they are caregivers, not exploiters (cf. Ps. 72:8–14). We do unto creation as God has done unto us; we express love and care toward the world. Being image bearers of God is also at the heart of how we see other humans, which results in treating them with dignity, regardless of race, age, gender, social or economic status.

FOCUS SCRIPTURE

Genesis 1:1—2:4a

Focus on Your Teaching

When adults read or listen to the account of creation in Genesis 1, many will think of contemporary debates about evolution, genetic modification, and climate change. Others will ponder what it means to discern truth in the Bible. Some may wonder how this account came to be in its written form. On this Trinity Sunday, encourage participants in your study group to celebrate the magnificence and inscrutability of the Triune God and to dig deeply and thoughtfully into what it means to be given charge of the creation.

*Creator, send your Spirit to fill me with a sense of wonder and the will to care for what you have created. In the name of your Son, Jesus, I pray.
Amen.*

YOU WILL NEED

- board or newsprint
- markers
- Bibles
- paper, pencils
- copies of Resource Sheet 1
- copies of Resource Sheet 1 for June 18, 2017

For Responding

- option 1: copies of Resource Sheet 2, highlighter pens; meditative music (optional)
- option 2: copies of Resource Sheet 1, 4" x 18" construction paper, scissors, colorful wide-tipped markers, tape
- option 3: index cards, pens

LEADING THE SESSION

GATHERING

Before the session, if all participants do not have the same Bible version, bring Bibles of the same version for adults to use or download Genesis 1:1—2:4 from a Web site such as www.biblegateway.com and bring a copy for each person. If you are using option 2 in Responding, cut 12" x 18" construction paper into 4" x 18" strips, at least two strips per participant.

Welcome each group member by name. Say that today is observed as Trinity Sunday in the Christian church year. Recall that the word *trinity* means “three.” Today the church celebrates the three ways that God is present and active in our lives: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (or use the names that your church uses in worship).

Say this prayer or one of your choosing:

Holy God, Three-in-One, we gather today seeking your good news. Open to us the mysteries of your love. Amen.

Invite adults to recall slogans about caring for creation or the earth that they heard when they were children or youth. (If you need to prime the discussion, recall slogans such as “Only you can prevent forest fires” or “Don’t be a litterbug.”) Record these sayings on newsprint or a board. Discuss:

- ✪ What is helpful about such slogans?
- ✪ What are the limitations of sayings like these?

Say that today’s Scripture reading is the source of discussions about caring for creation as God’s people.

Christians name the Trinity in several ways, including: Father, Son, Holy Spirit; Creator, Redeemer, Sanctifier; Creator, Savior, Spirit. In your group, use the wording your church uses most often in worship, but also refer to the others to help broaden participants' understanding.

EXPLORING

Ask adults to open their Bibles to Genesis 1:1—2:4a or distribute copies of this passage. Read aloud the following information to help establish the context of this passage within the Bible:

. . . [W]hen we locate the setting of Genesis 1 in history, most scholars point to the time of exile, when darkness and chaos and another set of waters (the Tigris and Euphrates) had once again captured Israel's life and hope and forward progress. If you were an Israelite exile in Babylon, torn away from the order of Temple and land and worship that had ordered your universe, one of the only places to turn for hope was the created order. —Richard Boyce, *Feasting on the Word, Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary*, Year A, Volume 3 (Westminster John Knox, 2010; 29.)

Form two groups. Read the text aloud in unison, alternating verses between groups. Take a quiet moment for group members to reflect on the reading and then invite their reactions to it, including questions they have. Ask:

- ✪ What rhythms or patterns do you perceive in this text?
- ✪ What do these rhythms or patterns say to you about creation?
- ✪ How do you understand the importance of the phrases “and God said” and “then God said”?
- ✪ Which parts of this text have invited debate or controversy in the church and in society at large? Why do you think this has been so?

Distribute copies of Resource Sheet 1 (Focus on Genesis 1:1—2:4a). Give adults a few minutes to read the “What?” and “Where?” excerpts to themselves. Ask group members to point out phrases or sentences that they find especially helpful or especially confusing. Discuss:

- ✪ How do you understand the significance of creation's “goodness”?
- ✪ What does it mean to be a steward of such goodness?
- ✪ If a ten-year-old asked you why God created the world, what would you say?

Distribute paper and pencils. Challenge pairs or groups of three to write a ten-word summary of the focus passage, striving to communicate the essence of what they feel is most important in this scripture. Ask each pair to read its summary to the group. Invite comments on the similarities or differences among them.

To transition to Responding, ask a volunteer to read aloud the “Now What?” excerpt from Resource Sheet 1. Discuss:

- ✪ When have you observed humankind seeking to exert domination over creation?
- ✪ When have you observed examples of people exercising careful dominion over creation?
- ✪ When you think of yourself as being created in the image of God, what hopes do you have for your future? For the future of creation?
- ✪ When have you felt encouraged as a steward of creation? When have you been able to encourage others in their stewardship?

When group members don't respond to a discussion question right away, resist the temptation to offer your own response or another question. Many adults appreciate being given a quiet moment to gather their thoughts before speaking.

EASY
PREP

RESPONDING

Choose one or more of these activities depending on the length of your session:

- 1. Meditation on Why** As they reflect on a commentary about the creation story, adults will discern prayer concerns as stewards of creation. Distribute copies of Resource Sheet 2 (God, the Creator) and highlighters. Read aloud the opening question. Invite adults to read the excerpt to themselves, highlighting words or phrases that help them to answer the question. Option: Play meditative music as participants work. After all have finished, discuss the second question as a group. Encourage adults to work in pairs to write a prayer for all who seek to be faithful stewards of creation. Finish the activity with a time of prayer, asking each pair to offer its prayer.
- 2. Stewardship Slogans** Adults will create and post slogans to encourage other church members to be faithful stewards of creation. Review the slogans about caring for creation identified during Gathering. Based on the readings and discussion during this session, add sayings or slogans to the list. Discuss how these teachings might be edited to be effective for children, youth, and adults. Set out 4" x 18" strips of construction paper and colorful wide-tipped markers. Invite adults to print the slogans in bold lettering on the strips. Ask pairs to wander around the church building and tape their slogans to door, wall, windows, mirrors, or other places that church members will read them.
- 3. Creation Action** Adults will listen to each other's ideas about ways to be faithful stewards of creation and choose a suggestion to implement. Challenge adults to brainstorm things they could do to be more faithful stewards, based on the readings and discussion during this session. List all ideas on the board or newsprint. Distribute index cards and pens. Ask each participant to choose one action to take in the coming month and write it on the index card and to place the card where it will remind them of this. How might group members support one another in doing these things?

CLOSING

As you gather the group for the closing, read aloud the "So What?" excerpt on Resource Sheet 1. Invite adults to tell about ways that God is active in their lives today.

Ask a volunteer to read aloud Psalm 8, the psalm appointed for worship on Trinity Sunday. Pray aloud the following prayer or one of your own:

*Holy God, Three-in-One, help us to rejoice in your gift of creation.
Strengthen us as stewards of your creating work, that all may find
wholeness and peace in your reign. In Jesus' name. Amen.*

Distribute copies of Resource Sheet 1 for June 18, 2017, or e-mail it to the participants during the week. Encourage participants to read the focus scripture and Resource Sheet 1 before the next session.

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June 11, 2017
God, the Creator

Adult
Resource Sheet 2

God, the Creator

✿ What does it mean to care for creation as God has cared for us?

God is the creator of the world; but the primary focus is not that God created the world but why God created the world. The reason: God loves humans. God's specialty is loving and caring for creation. God demonstrates this love in the collaborative way in which the world operates. Genesis 1:1–2:4 recounts the six days of creation. Nothing is made for itself alone. Everything contributes to the whole of creation . . .

Each part contributes to the whole. God provides for the needs of all God's creatures because God's specialty is love. However, God did not make the order of creation rigid or mechanical; humans are still called upon to subdue it (1:28; 2:15). Rather, God created a flexible, dynamic, and complex world with a mind of its own—again a demonstration of God's love. . . .

Without God's ever-present involvement, the world would not be able to continue, and humans would not be able to live. John Walton maintains, "Instead of proclaiming that 'the cosmos was created by God' (using past tense as if the job is done), we should rather proclaim, 'The cosmos is God's creation.' We may thus lay claim to the dynamic role of God in a perpetual act of creation." (John Walton, *Genesis, NIV Application Commentary* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001]) 105.) . . .

God loves, sustains, and cares for the universe and all its inhabitants day by day.

—Excerpted from David Bland, *Feasting on the Word, Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary*, Year A, Volume 3 (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2010; 29, 31)

✿ How might we reflect the collaborative nature of God's creation in our stewardship?

My Prayer for Stewards of Creation

