

Genesis 2:4b-25
God Created...Families
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**How the Tiger Got Its Stripes*

<https://www.primaryconcepts.com/parts/articles/MD6004.pdf>

My grandma had a children's book of folk tales at her house when I was young. This story was in that book, along with others like, "How the Leopard Got His Spots" and "How the Camel Got His Hump." But, "How the Tiger Got Its Stripes" was my favorite. It's a type of story called a pourquoi tale. Pourquoi tales come from Vietnam and are origin stories that explain why an animal or plant looks or acts the way it does. All cultures and religions have their own origin stories, written to explain the seemingly unexplainable.

*The story Dianne read for us this morning is one of two origin stories in the Bible. Both of the biblical origin stories were written to explain how the earth, and all that inhabits it, came to be. The stories, found in Genesis 1 and Genesis 2, have mostly been conflated, a lot like we conflate the two birth stories of Jesus in Matthew and Luke. Think about it...our nativity scenes usually include shepherds and kings. These characters don't appear in both stories. Likewise, the two origin stories have some important differences.

One of those differences is that in the Genesis 1 story, God's powerful, over the top, creative activity is the focus, bringing order to chaos, while in the Genesis 2 story, the focus is less on God's super powers and more on human beings and experience of being human. In Genesis 1, God, day after day, created all the things and then, for the grand finale, God created human beings. In contrast, in the Genesis 2 story, God created the first human and that human was present as God

planted a magnificent garden and created a spectacularly diverse variety of animals.

The first human, like all the creatures in the story, is formed from the dust of the ground. In Hebrew the word for ground is *adamah*, so the first human was called *adam* (Adam) which means “from the ground.” Perhaps in English, a more fitting name would be “Dusty.” Following the creation of *adam*, God created a beautiful place for *adam* to be, it was called Eden, from the Hebrew root word that means fertility. Based on what we know about ancient geography, it is impossible to say if the author of this story had in mind a specific place when he wrote about Eden. But the point is, Eden was a fertile place for plants and animals and *adam* to grow and it was the origin for the water sources that would give life to the world located in the story.

You will recall, in the first creation story, after God created light on the first day, God declared it good. And the same was true for each of the six days God created. Always, at the end of each day, God declared it good. But here in Genesis 2, God created *adam* and Eden, with all the beautiful trees and plants, and said, “It is **not good** that *adam* should be alone.” So, God, in an effort to find a suitable partner for *adam*, formed all the animals and birds and brought them to *adam*. *Adam* named them, but did not find a partner.

Our English translation of what happens next has led us astray a little bit. The original Hebrew rendering is a much cooler story. I would guess, most of us who have been taught this story were taught that God put the first human, who was a man, to sleep and took one of his ribs, and made the second human, who was a woman. According to the story, though, the first human was neither male nor female. Remember, *adam* simply means “from the ground.” Out of concern for *adam*, God creates another human. But, not from a rib of the first. Instead, God created the second human by dividing the first human into two parts. It is only when there are two humans that one is identified as

male and the other female. “[Through this act] The Divine affirms we all need to be in relationships. Thus, our lives are about finding that which completes us” (Rev. Dr. Lisa Davison, Professor of Hebrew Bible, Phillips Theological Seminary, “What the Bible Says or Doesn’t say About Homosexuality”).

Interpreted like this, it is clear that male-ness and female-ness were created at exactly the same time, with equal status, equal worth. The idea that a woman is subordinate to a man is not supported in this story and is not a part of the ideal world God created in the garden. Who doesn’t love that?? But wait, there’s more! What I really love about this creation story is that in one grand act of love, God created the very first family. This first family consisted of two humans, one male and one female, because let’s face it, in a world where life span was short and infant mortality was high, procreation was the main thing. But we know the days of anxiety over not having enough people are over and we also know families should be about much more than producing babies. Families are about loving, nurturing relationships. And the evidence we see in our own lives and the lives of the people we love, tells us that there are many different kinds of families.

And this is very good. I’m sure this is not a new idea to you, but our faith calls us to consider all other human beings our siblings, yes, “We are Family...” How ever you believe the world was created, we were all created the same way, from the same creative spark. How do you think the world would be different if the CEO of a Fortune 500 company understood himself to be the sibling of the people working on the manufacturing line of his factory? Or what if the president of the health insurance company really believed the ones insured by her company were her siblings? What if the people in charge of marketing tobacco products saw themselves as family to every potential buyer? How would Bartlesville be different if each one of us took to heart this biblical mandate of kinship with our neighbors?

Would there still be children who don't have lunch money? Would there be people without shelter? Would all workers in our community be paid a living wage, feel safe in the workplace, get time off to take their children to the doctor? Don't misunderstand me, I know we can't wave a wand or even just throw a lot of money at these problems and fix it all. But I do know we can influence the world through our relationships with our family, the one in our homes and our extended family which includes our neighbors. Relationships matter.

*In his book, *Holy Currencies: 6 Blessings for Sustainable Missional Ministries*, Episcopal Priest and author, Eric Law, writes about the theory of "three degrees of influence." This theory is similar to "six degrees of separation," which refers to the idea that on average, everyone on earth is approximately six relationships away from everyone else on earth. In the mid 90's, a popular party game was called "Six Degrees of Kevin Bacon." Players would challenge each other to find the shortest path between an arbitrary actor and actor Kevin Bacon. There's even a website called "Oracle of Kevin Bacon" that will help.

*I went to the website (of course I did) and typed in Kevin Bacon to Betty White. I found out there are 2 degrees of separation between these actors. Betty White was in *The Proposal* with Ryan Reynolds who was in a movie called *R.I.P.D* with Kevin Bacon. But I digress...The idea behind "three degrees of influence" is that everything we do or say affects our friends, our friends' friends and our friends' friends' friend (three degrees of influence). The example of this that Law uses in the book is, let's say something amazing happens in worship (probably some brilliant words are said by the minister) and 100 people hear them and are inspired to perform a random act of kindness because of what the brilliant minister said. And let's say each of those 100 people has even just 5 friends. That's 500 in the first degree, 2500 in the

second degree, and 12,500 people in the third degree...every one of them are inspired to do a kind thing too. That's a third of the population of Bartlesville affected by all of that kindness. The world, the United States, Oklahoma, Bartlesville, our workplaces, our schools, our church, our homes, are all completely dependent on relationships. Relationships matter.

*In the *Holy Currencies* book, there are six, what Law calls, "currencies" that must be present and must be flowing through an organization or church or even a family to make them healthy and sustainable. Relationships are one of those currencies. Talking about the church's role in the community, he writes, "Our Christian community is called to be a network that connects people from very diverse backgrounds and experiences---man and woman, young and old, rich and poor, powerful and powerless, straight and gay, job providers and jobless, political right and political left, those who have a home and those who have none, the filled and the hungry, etc." I'm not a fan of the binary ways in which he describes people, but his point is solid, there is value for our community and for the world, in our connectedness and our relationships.

For me, the truth in Genesis 2 isn't that the first human named all the animals or even that the first human was divided in two. The truth is that God created us for relationship. We need each other. And not just each other, but the people that aren't sitting in this room right now. And I believe that, through our relationships, we can spread goodness or it we can spread destructiveness. The choice is ours. And I also believe the consequences of choosing destructiveness will not only affect us, but our children and our children's children and our children's children's children.

I want to end this morning with a story a friend told me this week and I haven't been able to stop thinking about it. We will be talking about it

this week at our *Holy Currencies* book discussion groups and at the sermon talk back group. I look forward to hearing your thoughts. My friend heard this story at a training event she attended. I may not get it exactly right, but I think you will get the idea.

*She began: Every one of us is living on a cliff.

*Each person in our lives who nurtures, invests in, and loves us, is like a tree planted around us, between where we are and the cliff. The more people we have in our lives, the more positive loving relationships we have, the more trees planted around us.

*The more trees we have planted around us, the less we see that cliff, and eventually it disappears altogether. Our relationships with other people keep us from stepping off the cliff.

Dear ones, we are called to be trees. Be a tree. Amen.