

Life Sunday Sermon 2016

Isaiah 43:1 “Created-Redeemed-Called – The Trinitarian Value of Life”

Rev. Daniel Domke, Mount Calvary Lutheran Church (LCMS), Huron, South Dakota

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Unto Him who has washed us of our sin with His own blood and made us to be kings and priests unto His Father and God, to Him be all power and glory forever and ever. Amen!

Isaiah 43:1: “But now thus says the LORD, he who created you, O Jacob, he who formed you, O Israel: ‘Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine.’”

Creation

“Man is the most precious, the most complex, and the most mysterious creature in the universe. And the reason for this is that he was created in the image and likeness of God. If psychologists, anthropologists, and others would try to understand the distinctive peculiarities of man and his behavior, they must begin at the beginning and start with his creation and there note especially the words, ‘God created man in his own image after his own likeness’” (Genesis 1:26).¹

Alfred Rehwinkel’s words set the tone for the message today. What a wonder our Creator God is who formed us into the beings we are: precious, complex, and mysterious. He created us in the moment He spoke the words, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness” (Genesis 1:26).

Man was created in the image of the Triune God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Man was created with personality and free will. Man was created with rationality and intelligence. He was given emotionality and morality. Adam and Eve had immortality of soul and body, and they had sovereignty over God’s creation by God’s command: “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and

¹ Rehwinkle, Alfred M. (1974). *Wonders of creation*. St. Louis: CPH. p. 226.

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over every living thing that moves on the earth” (Genesis 1:28). Everything was very, very good!

God loved man and was loved in return.

So, I wonder. How did things turn out? Not so good? Selfish pride arose, and Adam and Eve wanted to be just themselves; condemning us all to a broken world. The image of God in man was lost, destroyed, and vanquished. They sinned, defying God’s command. They ignored the promise of great good, choosing a great evil. Great harm has flourished throughout the centuries since, and untold millions have died and entered a Christ-less eternity. In the wake of this great harm, death and destruction followed as an intractable enemy.

God had created this planet for mankind to live on. God wanted Adam and Eve to freely love Him as He loved them. In the beginning Adam and Eve literally walked with their Creator, talking and fellowshiping in flawless and exquisite joy. This did not last long, though, for in the cool of one afternoon, God came searching for those who were now dying (Genesis 3:8). With the coming of sin, drudgery of work came, and with death, the irreparable brokenness which only God could mend. It is so very sad and such a shame, and it explains the nature of the world in which we live.

Now living in a broken world, people “deliberately” overlook(ed) this fact: “That the heavens existed long ago, and the earth was formed out of water and through water by the word of God” (2 Peter 3:5). In overlooking the truth of God’s creation, many people have turned to pagan substitutions for God (Romans 1:20). Did you know some believe that the Greek goddess Gaia is Mother Earth (Mother Nature), and the people living here on Earth are aliens and are trespassing on her? Mankind has been called a virus which has infected Mother Earth (Gaia), which, in part, has led to the devaluing of humankind. Gaia or Mother Nature, by the way, is

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purely a non-Christian and pagan teaching.² God created Earth to sustain life, mankind in particular. From a biblical worldview, Adam and Eve were created here and were native to the planet; so are we.

A void is created when you turn from the one true God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—to empty, false, non-existent gods. Voids are created when men ignore the obvious truth. And with this void comes blindness to the obvious example that God created. A void is never empty for long. If God is not already there, something will take His place, and it is never good.

Death is lurking and seeking every one of us because of our first parents. Adam and Eve broke the perfect world! Their actions skewed, twisted, and distorted the perfect creational plan of God for the planet: for marriage, family, children, gender roles, and gender identity. When evolution is substituted for creation, we are creating a void as we deliberately forget God and what He did. Or we try to hang on to God, but we try to change who He is and alter what He has done, and this is idolatry.

Family, as God has defined it, is morphing into something unrecognizable. We can see the effects of secularism all around us. Evolution is accepted as a fact, no longer a theory. Marriage in general is waning; couples are more often than not choosing to live together in sexual immorality rather than marrying. As the moral decline of our nation spreads, it is leading to the growing acceptance of same-sex marriage. With such changes, we face a growing challenge to speak the truth in love to all, especially to those held captive by empty philosophies.

² Gaia Theory is a pagan way of understanding life on our planet. The theory asserts that living organisms and their inorganic surroundings have evolved together as a single living system that greatly affects the chemistry and conditions of Earth's surface. The roots of this theory go back to Greek mythology.

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Paul warns us, “I say this in order that no one may delude you with plausible arguments” (Colossians 2:4). A lie can sound right and so very good and still be a lie. And that is how Satan often works. Satanic deception is one reason we need to be in the Word developing a biblical worldview one Bible study at a time to be discerning of the truth and fend off satanic or fleshly delusion. Creation is broken and groans under the weight of a sin-cursed world, but there is hope in Christ. So we, with all creation, wait for redemption (Romans 8:19-23).

God has reached out through the prophets and evangelists, through the inspired, inerrant and infallible Scriptures, proclaiming to the world His plan to redeem and save us.

Redemption

In the Garden of Eden there were two trees, the **tree of the knowledge of good and evil** and the **tree of life**. The fruit of the first was forbidden. The Lord God wanted Adam and Eve to know only good. But in disobeying, they would know both. This is not about knowing right from wrong; they knew it was wrong to eat that fruit. Eve, responding to the serpent, said, “We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden, but God said, ‘You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, [and then she adds] neither shall you touch it, lest you die’” (Genesis 3:2-3). Good and evil are experiences. Adam and Eve knew good when they saw and felt it, but now, for the first time after eating the fruit, they experienced evil, and it was excruciating. Everything changed.

They had the exercise of free will, and for free will to be real, they had to have the opportunity to choose. And they did. They chose themselves. Where there had been peace, there was fear. Where there had been joy, now sadness. With the sadness, the dying had begun. God

did not plan this evil. In His foreknowledge, He saw it coming. In His mercy, He had a plan to redeem condemned mankind.

The fruit of the second tree gave life and was offered freely. We could assume they ate of it daily. I would suggest this tree is the first Gospel in the Bible. We often say it was Genesis 3:15: “I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.” There is certainly Gospel in this, as it is a reference to Christ’s work on the cross.

Consider this: The apostle John in writing the Revelation of Jesus Christ and speaking of the “tree of life” in chapter 22:2 does not use the word for tree, *Dendron*, as it is used in Matthew 3:10: “Every tree therefore ...” *Dendron* is used for ordinary trees, such as “dendrology,” the scientific study of trees. Now, the exciting part is this. The word used for the tree of life by the Holy Spirit in Revelation is a different word, *Zulon*,³ and this tree is in the heavenly paradise of God. Revelation 22:2 tells us that trees of life stand on both banks of the river of life in the heavenly Jerusalem.⁴ The Hebrew word in Genesis for tree is the word for ordinary trees, but in the Septuagint, a Greek translation of Genesis (and the entire Old Testament), the word *Zulon* (ξύλου)⁵ is once again used.

The tree of life, my friends, is the cross of Christ. The tree is the wood of suffering and death. In fact, in classical usage, this Greek word is sometimes used for gallows. The fruit of the second tree is redemption.

³ (Rev. 2:7; 22:2, 14, 19)

⁴ Kittel, G., Bromiley, G. W., & Friedrich, G. (Eds.). (1964–). *Theological dictionary of the New Testament* (electronic ed., Vol. 5, p. 40). Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans.

⁵ Rahlfs, A. (1988, 1989). *Septuaginta*. New York, NY: United Bible Societies.

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Listen to what Peter says referring both to Christ and to the tree of life: “He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, [*zulon*] that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed. The healing of the nations is forgiveness of sin by means of Christ crucified.” This is God’s visible love for you. God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—is a gracious, merciful God, who wants nothing less than for flawless and exquisite joy to be returned to us. As we enter into paradise and share in the fruits of the tree of life, we will again walk with our Creator in the cool of the afternoon, talking and fellowshiping in flawless and exquisite joy.

We will in Christ’s redemption gain such a life because we have been cleansed of our sins by the blood of Christ (Revelation 22:14). The martyrs who have carried the day against earthly and satanic powers (2:7)⁶ will be alive and whole, not because they suffered but because Christ suffered on the tree of life. In Christ, all the sorrows of this world will melt away.

God created man, male and female, for a threefold and trinitarian purpose: To live our lives to His glory, that’s one. To marry if God wills, that’s two. And to have children, that’s three. Marriage was created by God, not by society nor by government. Marriage is not a societal construct. Marriage was instituted by God. Family flows out of this wondrous God-created relationship of one man and one woman who are to live together for a lifetime. As such, they are to live as husband and wife, seeking God’s blessings which the Lord freely gives.

In terms of marriage, Jesus ties this godly institution back to Genesis: “And Pharisees came up to him and tested him by asking, ‘Is it lawful to divorce one’s wife for any cause?’ He answered, ‘Have you not read that he who created them from the beginning made them male and

⁶ Kittel, G., Bromiley, G. W., & Friedrich, G. (Eds.). (1964–). *Theological dictionary of the New Testament* (electronic ed., Vol. 5, p. 40). Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans.

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female,’ and said, ‘Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh’? So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together let not man separate” (Matthew 19:3-6).

The trinitarian value of life is rooted in God creating us in His own image. Male and female (Genesis 1:27) come to be one flesh in marriage, and in this oneness, they reflect the very nature of God who is one, yet three persons. Israel’s great confession is “Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is *one*” (Deuteronomy 6:4). The Scriptures teach there is but one God in three persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. In another place the Holy Spirit wrote, “For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus” (1 Timothy 2:5). As Jesus told Philip, “Whoever has seen me has seen the Father” (John 14:9).

The “oneness” of God is to be reflected in the primary purpose of godly marriage. In this context, marriage cannot be understood apart from understanding the nature of God—who is three in one and one in three—nor can it be understood apart from creation and redemption. Can life and marriage and family be understood as God intended? Yes! Pursuing God’s design for marriage is essential in fulfilling God’s purposes for mankind and, may I add, for mankind’s happiness on earth.

God’s design for marriage is for a man and a woman, in all their created masculine and feminine differences, to come together and become “one.” Not just “one flesh” in the sense of the physical, sexual union, but more than that. The oneness that occurs is a beautiful, physical illustration of God’s intention for the rest of their lives.

Called

There is, however, a small problem which required a big solution. And God Himself had to solve the intractable problem.

The solution appeared in the coming of Christ Jesus, the God Man, who turned the curse of death into a doorway to eternal life for all who receive Christ as their Savior.

Christ was promised (Genesis 3:15) and then Christ came as promised. He is one with the Father and the Holy Spirit. Christ came to save and to redeem. In dying on the cross to forgive the sin of the world (John 1:29), the message is powerful for those who hear the message of the Gospel and turn to Christ in faith. They will be saved. Through the Gospel we are called by God to come to Christ.

The Word of the Lord records this powerful question, “‘Sirs, what must I do to be saved?’ And they said, ‘Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household.’” And they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house. And he took them the same hour of the night and washed their wounds; and he was baptized at once, he and all his family” (Acts 16:30-33). We are all sinful and outside the grace of God until we are called. The good news: God has called us and is calling all by the Gospel.

We are called by the Gospel into a living hope. Listen to the Word of God: “Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead” (1 Peter 1:3).

Ever been hopeless? Ever been in a place where you could not see any light or find doorways which led you away from or out of the darkness? Christ Jesus is the answer. He is the solution, and He is both the light and the resurrection for you. The darkness is a place God has

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called you and me to leave. It is the darkness of sin and the slavery to fear, hurt, and sorrow, out of which God has called us and set us on the rock who is Christ (1 Corinthians 10:4), and He leads us out in joyful procession (2 Corinthians 2:14).

Men and women who are married are not carbon copies of each other, but are two people uniquely and distinctly created, who, in the calling of the Gospel, are being transformed into the image of Christ, as all Christians are. This happens from the time of Baptism, for “baptism now saves” (1 Peter 3:21) till the day we are called home, “according to his promise we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells” (2 Peter 3:13).

God’s design in His calling is always moving us toward oneness with spouse and with the church. As God moves us we learn to love, we mature, and we develop in a way that no other relationship is capable of producing. Put simply, God is working through the Word to transform us into the people He wants us to be.

This “oneness” in the Trinity is the nature of God. This “oneness in marriage” is profoundly unique, reflecting a portion of what it means to be made in the image of God and how marriage and family are designed to reflect the nature of Christ’s body, the church. So marriage is a profoundly unique thing that is strengthened by years of shared experiences, trials, triumphs, challenges, and victories. The oneness of marriage is why Grandpa can start a sentence and Grandma can finish it. It’s why when she cries, he tastes the salt. It’s her knowing what’s wrong without him speaking a word. It’s two lives becoming one. It takes time, effort, sweat, and tenacity. But the rewards are like none other on earth. God has called us to be part of His design for marriage, family, and church on earth. The Lord in the calling of the Gospel reveals His plan for eternal life.

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At the very core of the nature of the Trinity is relationship and oneness. Each member of the Trinity has His work, and as the Godhead is “one,” so it is with husband and wife and so it is with God’s church. Each has his/her place and work in God’s plan for the family, and husband and wife are to be one in flesh, one in faith, one in hope, and one in purpose. Their “oneness” by God’s grace and calling should reflect the character and unity of the Triune God as Scripture says, “Did he not make them one, with a portion of the Spirit in their union? And what was the one God seeking? Godly offspring. So guard yourselves in your spirit, and let none of you be faithless to the wife of your youth” (Malachi 2:15).

We are all called by the Gospel to come to Christ to be saved. We are all called by the Gospel for it is the power of God (Romans 1:16) at work to bring forgiveness of sin and the joy of knowing that God has created us and redeemed us.

It is no small thing to come to the point of realizing that evolution is a myth. It is no small thing to come to the point of realizing that God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—really and truly exist from eternity,⁷ and that everyone who denies this reality is plagued by a dreadful delusion. God has called us all out of that darkness into Christ, and with that passage we make the joyful discovery that every word of the Scripture is true.

I was taught in the earliest days of Sunday school that God made the world and everything in it. Those who grew up in the 50s and 60s were taught in church and Sunday school the Bible was true, and that creation was a fact. But in public school, we were taught that we were the chance random product of a mindless power that had no real purpose for our existence.

⁷ Luther, M. (1991). *Luther’s small catechism with explanation*. Saint Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House.

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Somewhere in that process many of us concluded in one fashion or another that pleasure was the goal of living because there was simply nothing else to live for.

Achieving that goal was, well, accomplished any way you could, even if it meant walking on the people who were in the way. It was just a means to an end, nothing personal.

After all, moral neutrality was the way we were taught to interpret life, and that stance was taken from the misleading and distorted evolutionary and secular principles of the world. It should have been no surprise, but it was, that that way of thinking was selfish. It has turned lives into a dead end of broken dreams, broken minds, broken marriages, and broken families. In the wake of such thinking are the broken bodies of babies, teenagers, and adults. The good news in Christ is you are called by the Gospel to something so much better: abundant life because of God’s grace and mercy. God’s greatest joy is to bind up the broken, and that is offered to all of us (Isaiah 61:1; Hosea 6:1).

Jesus is saying to you: “Come to Me, you who are burdened with weights which kill and destroy.” Listen, “But now thus says the LORD, he who created you” (Isaiah 43:1). Who created you? The Lord God created (*Bara בָּרָא*) you. He shaped you as a potter shapes the clay. He fashioned you. He calls to you who are guilty of every kind of sin. He calls you, the hate-filled, the bearer of anger and lust. He calls you who have neglected the promise of good in Christ. In this call are joy, peace, and eternal life. No one is too sinful; no one has done anything too evil for God not to cleanse. You see, the power is in the blood of Christ, the cross, and the empty tomb. No wrong desire, no wrong thinking, no wrong anything is so wrong that God cannot or will not forgive in Christ. God is merciful to broken people. In Christ your sin is forgiven.

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We were created, redeemed, and called by the one true God. To Him we owe our lives and our souls. We are a new creation in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17; Galatians 6:15), we are one in Christ, and we are the Church, Christ’s body—one yet many. In response and in one voice we proclaim to the world a living Savior, Jesus Christ, who has created, redeemed, and called us to freedom and eternal life. In Jesus’ name. Amen!