

From the Earth

by Rev. Joe Connolly

“...*Yahweh*, God, said, ‘It is not good for this creature of the earth, this one I have made out of the *adamah*, made out of the earth, to be alone; I will make a fitting companion, a partner for it.’” — Genesis 2:18.

I have often regaled you with tales of my days as a professional writer. And, to be clear, I was a writer mostly for theater related projects. And, since I have been a writer and people who know me know that, occasionally someone will say to me their impression of most writers is that most writers are loners.

Many have that impression. It is not far fetched. Even I think most writers are loners. They go off to their towers, ivory or otherwise, and scribble, scribble, scribble— or these days type, type, type on a computer— pages and pages and pages of prose.

Then the writer emerges, finalized copy in hand, ready to share it with the world. And the world is not permitted to change a single letter, word, comma or paragraph, thank you.

But there is something unique about being a writer for theater which sets those of us involved in the profession apart. We are different breed than most writers— novelists, essayists, etc.

How are theater writers different? This is a given: theater is a collaborative art.

It takes many, many people of great talent— actors, directors, producers, musicians, set, sound and lighting designers, sometimes even other writers, multiple writers— to present a stage play. And all of these collaborators will bring change to what has been written.

It is a demand of the art of theater to embrace change in the process of creating. It is the nature of the art of theater to incorporate change in the process of creating. It is the character of the art of theater to include change in the process of creating.

Hence, a theater writer may initially find some tower in which to write. But the theater writer needs to know and understand that, upon emerging from said tower, change is a part of the process of creating. And perhaps what is equally important is to understand collaboration, working with others, is a part of the process of creating.

Having said occasionally someone will say their impression is that most writers are loners, the truth is as a writer for theater I am not a loner. No one who works in theater can be a loner.

The profession does not allow for that. In fact, more than one person has noticed I try to collaborate when I write and I try to collaborate in many things I do. I do not think I am a born collaborator.

I think I learned how to collaborate (and I found out that I like to collaborate). So because of my background and my training in theater I collaborate. It’s what theater people do. We collaborate. (Slight pause.)

We find these words in the work known as Genesis. “...*Yahweh*, God, said, ‘It is not good for this creature of the earth, this one I have made out of the *adamah*, made out of the earth, to be alone; I will make a fitting companion, a partner for it.’” (Slight pause.)

I think you probably know this reading is the second of two takes on creation in the first chapters of Genesis.

Please notice, I did not call these creation stories.

Why? Neither of these takes are descriptions of creation— not even close. Hence, they are not stories which concern how creation came about. So, if this is not a story about creation or even about how creation happened, what is it? (Slight pause.)

There are a bunch of things which jump out for me. But let's start with the obvious. I hope the translation [1] I used made it clear the word '*adam*' [2] is not a name. The *adamah* is the earth, the ground, the dust of the ground. *Adam* is, therefore, an earth creature, made out of the ground, from the ground. Equally, *ish* is not a name but a word which means giver of life.

Additionally, *Yahweh*, God, has made this earth creature and loves what God has been made. How do I know God loves the earth creature?

In words which came before the section of Scripture we heard today God acted as a bellows and breathes life into the *adam*. This "breath of life" is God's own living breath.

This is a divine act. And this act provides the only distinction between humans and animals. God does not breathe into the animals. They are simply created out of the *adamah*, out of the earth.

Additionally and therefore, the *adam*, this earth creature, is a combination of the substance of the earth and the image of God, this breath of God. What seems clear is this passage constitutes a profound statement about human identity, about who we are.

Now, having formed the *adam* having breathed life into the *adam*, what happens? Together with this *adam*, *Yahweh*, God, sets to a task. They begin a collaboration. The task? They name things.

God creates things and brings them to the *adam* so they can be named. This is not merely a collaboration. We watch as a relationship is developed.

Further, God has an ulterior motive which is stated quite clearly. God seeks a companion for the *adam*, the earth creature. I want to suggest this is when yet another level of collaboration happens.

God, you see, does not take this next step in isolation from the earth creature. God creates *ish*— the name which means giver of life— God creates *ish* out of the earth creature, out of the *adam*.

Thereby, the collaboration deepens and becomes richer and becomes inclusive of yet another earth creature made out of the *adam* and made out of the breath of God. Hence by its nature, by its reality, this very act instructs humanity about what we should be doing and what we need to be doing. We need to collaborate with one another, rely on one another, support one another. (Slight pause.)

Let me state the obvious. As I said minutes ago, this take on creation does not concern how creation came about. If this is a story about anything it is a story about relationship— a story about relationship with God— a story about relationship with other humans.

And yes, you may be tired of hearing me using the word 'covenant.' But because this is a story about relationship with God and relationship with other humans this is a story about covenant.

Something we have to realize, need to realize, is that covenants— because they are collaborative— covenants

are not contracts. Contracts do not change. They are and remain static.

Covenants, by their nature renew, animate, revive, regenerate, create, re-create, alter, live, breathe and yes, covenants change. And also yes, covenant is about collaboration.

It is a demand of the art of covenant to embrace change. It is a demand of the nature of covenant incorporate change. It is a demand of the fiber of covenant to include change.

Covenant, you see, *is* about the process of creating. Covenant is about the process of creating with God. Covenant is about the process of creating with others.

And oh yes, covenant is about the process of both creating and growing. Covenant is about the process of creating and growing in love, growing in peace, growing in wisdom, growing in knowledge, growing in understanding. And that, my friends is both *a* real story of creation and *the* real story of creation. We are invited by God to grow— to grow in love, in peace, in wisdom, in knowledge, in understanding. Amen.

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ENDPIECE: It is the practice of the Pastor to speak after the Closing Hymn, but before the Choral Response and Benediction. This is an précis of what was said: “The idea that Scripture should be taken literally is a relatively modern concept. Here’s proof that this idea is a modern concept and that Scripture needs to be seen as living and breathing and lives and breathes with us. The *Talmud* is an ancient commentary on the Hebrew Scriptures. It was in place by the year 200 of the Common Era. This is a quote from the *Talmud*: ‘To not be daunted by the enormity of the world’s grief. Do justice, now. Love mercy, now. Walk humbly, now. You are not obligated to complete the work but neither are you free to abandon it.’”

BENEDICTION: The love of God lasts for an eternity. The reign of God is in the present tense, not the future when we acknowledge and participate in the work of God’s will. So, let us go forth knowing that the grace of God is deeper than our imagination, the strength of Christ is stronger than our need and the communion of the Holy Spirit is richer than all our togetherness. May God guide and sustain us today and in all our tomorrows. Amen.

[1] This is the translation used and the introduction which preceded the reading of Genesis 2:18-23 [Inclusive Language Version] Because we do not read the passages from Scripture in their original languages, the translation we use today helps us hear some of the meanings behind words we often take as names. These meanings indicate something richer is happening here than mere naming.

[18] ...*Yahweh*, God, said, “It is not good for this creature of the earth, this one I have made out of the *adamah*, made out of the earth, to be alone; I will make a fitting companion, a partner for it.” [19] So also out of the ground, from the soil, out of the *adamah*, *Yahweh*, God, formed all the animals, every wild beast of the field and every bird of the air and brought them to the earth creature, the *adam*, so these could be named. Whatever the earth creature, the *adam*, called every living one, that became its name. [20] The earth creature gave names to all cattle and to the birds of the air, and to every animal of the field, all the wild animals.

But none of them proved to be a fitting companion, a partner for the *adam*, the earth creature. [21] So *Yahweh*, God, caused a deep sleep to fall on the earth creature. While it slept God divided the earth creature in two and then closed up the flesh from its side. [22] *Yahweh* then fashioned the two halves into male and female and presented them to one another.

[23] The male realized what had happened and said,
“This time this is the one!
Bone of my bone
and flesh of my flesh;
Now this one will be called *ish*”—
ish a word which means source of life
“and I shall be called *adam*”—
adam— a word which means from the ground
“for out of me was this one taken.”
Here ends this reading from Scripture.

[2] *Adam* is pronounced a-dam.