



CREATED to SERVE and PRESERVE EARTH

ELAINE WAINWRIGHT reads the very familiar Genesis 2 text of the creation showing humanity's responsibility to serve and preserve the Earth community.

This Genesis text of the creation and naming of the animals, the creation of woman and the celebration of the relationship between the man and the woman, is very familiar. It focuses on the human couple belonging in a web of emerging life.

There are two factors which can influence our ecological reading of this text: its familiarity and its focus on the human couple. We need to make sure that neither

Gen 2:18-24

Gen 2:18 Then God said: "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper as his partner." 19 So out of the ground God formed every animal of the field and every bird of the air, and brought them to the man to see what he would call them; and whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name.

20 The man gave names to all cattle, and to the birds of the air, and to every animal of the field; but for the man there was not found a helper as his partner.

21 So God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and he slept; then he took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh.

22 And the rib that God had taken from the man God made into a woman and brought her to the man.

23 Then the man said,

"This at last is bone of my bones
and flesh of my flesh;
this one shall be called Woman,
for out of Man this one was taken."

24 Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and clings to his wife, and they become one flesh.

stops us attending to how the human, the holy and the habitat are interconnected in this narrative.

Gen 2:18-24, the first reading for the 27th Sunday of Ordinary time, belongs in the wider context of Gen 2:4b-25. There we encounter the ancient storyteller narrating the origin of the universe in what may seem today to be a very primitive account. However, the early verses of Genesis 2 speak of unfolding and emerging which evoke contemporary stories of the origins and ongoing expansion of the universe. The seer tells of forming an Earth creature from the Earth itself – the *adam* from the *adamah* (Hebrew text of Gen 2:7). The task of the *adam* is to “serve” and to “preserve” (to till and to keep) the *adamah*, the Earth given as home. We hear that Earth precedes the Earth creature in this narrative of the emergence of the universe – as it does in our contemporary scientific narratives.

It is at this point that our focus on Gen 2:18-24 begins. The Creator discerns that it is not good for the Earth creature/the *adam* to be alone. However, we note the anthropocentric perspective here. The implication seems to be that it is not good for the Earth creature to be the lone one of its type. It may also imply that one Earth creature alone is insufficient to serve and preserve Earth. For contemporary readers, the different possibilities that the text evokes enable us to draw into our meaning-making some of the different ways in which we tell our stories of origins across a range of human cultures today.

As the narrative continues we encounter the divine intention to make a helper (an *āzer* in Hebrew) for the *adam*. This *helper* is not an inferior being. In fact there are texts within the Hebrew Bible that name the Divine as *āzer* (Ex 18:4; Deut 33:7; Ps 70:5). The *āzer* is the one who might remove the aloneness which accompanied the *adam* and his serving and preserving of the *adamah*. The text of Gen 2:18 evoking the aloneness of the *adam*/the earth creature opens into divine creativity and rich images of the countless

animals being formed and brought to the Earth creature in order to find this *āzer*/helper. The verses Gen 2:19-20 which recount the activity teem with creativity. They draw contemporary readers into the unfolding of the universe and all its constituents – into the world of today.

This entire narrative of creation invites us into a material world, a created world, a world in which divine creativity is forever at work in the unfolding of the universe

But the *adam* still cannot find a living creature that shares his same being. Replying to this lack, the storyteller recounts an amazing act of divine creativity. Earlier in Gen 2:7 we heard that the *adam* was formed “from the dust of the ground” and into the nostrils of this first creature, the Creator breathed the breath of life. The verse concluded with the phrase: the *adam* became a living being. We hear this story as teeming with life – the human and other-than-human intimately related in life.

God continues the creative process of seeking a companion for the *adam*. It becomes more complicated: a rib is taken from the *adam* and formed into a new creature

that the storyteller names as “woman”. A climatic exclamation emerges from the *adam*: “This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh.”

There is no hint in this extraordinary exclamation of inferiority on the basis of gender. Divine creativity has brought forth humanity as male and female through different processes but with a shared outcome. It is this which is celebrated in the exclamation:

This at last is bone of my bones
and flesh of my flesh;
This one shall be called Woman
for out of Man this one was
taken (Gen 2:23).

And while the text emphasises the creation of the human couple, it cannot be separated from the whole emergence of the heavens and earth and all living beings into which we are drawn as readers and listeners. This entire narrative of creation invites us into a material world, a created world, a world in which divine creativity is forever at work in the unfolding of the universe. 🌱

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Elaine Wainwright is a biblical scholar specialising in eco-feminist interpretation and is currently writing a Wisdom Commentary on Matthew's Gospel.



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