

The Thursday Sermon

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©MMIX by The Very Rev'd Rodney H. Longmire, Jr. MDCS Council 10:00 am Morning Prayer

This, the third council meeting of the Missionary Diocese of the Central States of the Reformed Episcopal Church; and, the first meeting of this council since the organizational meeting of the Anglican Church in North America. I only mention this detail of recent history because of the challenge issued by Archbishop Robert Duncan.

Bishop Duncan has challenged the ACNA to start 1000 new churches in five years. There are presently 700 congregations in the ACNA. This means that we, each congregation, has to start more than one new congregation. Not every new church plant will take root. So, a reasonable goal is for every one of our congregations to spend the next few months planning how to plant another congregation - and then to do it. We need to oversee these works for a period of two years, and then do it again.

The task seems daunting. The resources seem scarce. But man has been faced with daunting tasks since the very beginning.

It has been said that every doctrine of the faith has foundations in the early chapters of Genesis.

Genesis 1:28 And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it:...

This, commonly called the cultural mandate, is typically presented as the ordering of creation in which God's especial creature man is assigned the physical task of being the means by which God's dominion is exercised in God's creation. And there is not doubt

that this is a physical task.

Genesis 2:8 ¶ And the LORD God planted a garden eastward in Eden; and there he put the man whom he had formed.

Genesis 2:15 And the LORD God took the man, and put him into the garden of Eden to dress it and to keep it.

It is good to be reminded from time to time that even before the fall man was put to work. Work is not the result of sin entering the world. Being at work is the condition of man before the fall. And, there is nothing in this passage of Genesis that precludes it from being a kind of type, or Old Testament physical foreshadowing of a New Testament spiritual reality.

Let us consider this pre fall state of the world or *κοσμος*. The LORD God planted a garden east of eden. Adam was placed in the garden. Adam was charged to be fruitful and multiply. Shortly after Eve is brought to Adam, in the process of time - apart from sin - there would be a problem. Garden crowding! Garden crowding would be the inevitable result of being fruitful and multiplying; unless.....unless the garden was enlarged.

God planted a garden. Adam was to tend and keep it. But if there had been no sin resulting in eviction from the garden, there would have eventually have been the necessity for Adam and his sons and his son's sons to enlarge the garden.

Now note carefully how there is no specific command, or even a hinted plan of how to go about the process of garden enlargement. Here, even before the fall, we see that God does not give a detailed business plan to Adam for the being fruitful and multiplying business. Adam has to figure some things out for himself - as do we.

However, God did plant a garden. And God brought Eve to Adam. God supplied everything that was necessary for the being fruitful and multiplying business. But, there are no instructions.

Now note that in between the planting of the garden, and the bringing of Eve to Adam, that we have this curious passage:

Genesis 2:18 ¶ And the LORD God said, It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him.

19 And out of the ground the LORD God formed every beast of the field, and every fowl of the air; and brought them unto Adam to see what he would call them: and whatsoever Adam called every living creature, that was the name thereof.

20 And Adam gave names to all cattle, and to the fowl of the air, and to every beast of the field; but for Adam there was not found an help meet for him.

Now, seriously, do we really believe that the origin of the names of the various creatures was of such pressing concern to the people of Israel coming out of Egypt that Moses just had to put this passage in there? The Holy Spirit just had to let us know that it was Adam and not Able or Seth that named all the creatures? What is the point. Genesis is so sketchy on details that there just has to be a point to this passage other than a bit of historic trivia!

God brought before Adam every living creature. Adam was not just naming them. He was examining and cataloguing them. The examination was macroscopically exhaustive.

The Apostle Paul says in Romans 1:19that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath shewed it unto them. 20 For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead;...”

We tend to think of the non-living parts of creation when we read Romans 1. We are lead to think that way when we read...

Psalms 19:1 The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handywork.

Psalms 97:6 The heavens declare his righteousness, and all the people see his glory.

Yet it is not the stars to which God draws Adams attention, but to living things. All living creatures are the creation of God. And while rocks and stars are the creation of God we are more likely to use the word 'creature' (which means a creation) to refer to a living animal.

Now what does this have to do with the enlargement of the garden? What might this have to do with the planting of new churches? Note how we intuitively and instinctively (and without much examination) speak of planting new churches rather than building churches. The building of churches is something that is done after the planting. No one builds a church unless the church planting has taken root. God did not build a garden, he planted one.

Now we might well ask what Adam learned about garden expansion by looking at the animal kingdom in detail. Animals come in all sizes, from a mouse to an elephant. A mouse can only be so small. And an elephant can only be so big. And, animals reproduce by bringing into being other beings distinct from themselves but rather much just like themselves. Animals do not grow endlessly, they give birth - sometimes to one, sometimes to many.

Moses appointed captains of 1000's, 100's, 50's, and 10's. It has

been suggested that today in the church we have Bishops, Presbyters, Deacons, and the confirmed - all of which have had hands laid on them - that correspond to the captains Moses appointed. Further, in the Gospel of St. Mark, when Jesus fed the 5000, Jesus speaking to his disciples (who can be thought of as Jesus' captians of 1000's) organized those who were following him into companies of 50's and 100's.

I appears that the megachurch phenomena of the latter 20th and early 21st century is not the biblical pattern for growth.

There were four rivers flowing from Eden. This is strongly suggestive, taken with the action of God in showing Adam all of the animals (as opposed to the plants) that in the process of time it was expected that other gardens be started downstream.

The garden east of Eden was the pattern to be planted; the process of new life was to be patterned from the animals brought before Adam for his observation and naming.

It is not mere speculation that new gardens be planted rather than the one garden being endlessly enlarged. For after the events the creation, the fall, the flood, and the babel crisis (and yes the text is non-sequential here, this part of Genesis 10 has to take place after Genesis 11) we read in Genesis 10:5 "By these were the isles of the Gentiles divided in their lands; every one after his tongue, after their families, in their nations."

By the corrective action of God the big lump of people that tried to build the tower of babel were divided into peoples and lands. God always gets what God wants. God is not a God of suggestion, but of command. God did not give 10 suggestions, but 10 commandments. God gives instruction or orders from a position of power and authority.

How does the great commission start?

Matthew 28:19 Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost:

NO! That is not how the great commission starts.

18 And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth.

It is from this position of power certified to the all the sons of Adam and daughters of Eve by his resurrection that the living Christ issues forth his command:

19 Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost:

20 Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you:...

Everyone of us is a living and breathing part of garden that God has planted. What that garden will be is going to be determined by how we tend and keep it. But the sons of Adam and daughters of Eve were never intended to stay in that one garden east of Eden.

There is an whole world that needs to have gardens planted. The rivers from the one garden will flow from garden to garden. Every garden, every planting needs water. It is no accident that baptism is the means of initiation into discipleship in the great commission.

We are long since moved into a post-eden world. The sons of Adam and daughters of Eve do not need to move out from the garden east of Eden to the rest of the world - they are already out there. It is the gardens that need to be planted. The people are

there, but are in want of a garden where they can partake of the tree of life. Sons of Adam are needed to tend and keep new gardens. Captains of 100's and captains of 50's must be raised up to do this work. In every community in every state of this Diocese, there are men and women who are living as though they are cast out. We must call them in.

Will it be easy? No. Are resources plentiful? No. Do we have detailed instructions on how to do every little thing? No. We do not have anything more, or anything less than Adam had. Except, we have the certain sure knowledge of the risen Christ. We have his word. We have his promise. We have his command.

Now let us walk in faith. Let us fulfill the commands of scripture. Let us, each one of us, look towards the task of planting the next garden. Amen.