



ST HELIERS CHURCH  
& COMMUNITY CENTRE

# TAKEAWAY SUNDAY SERMON

## Being Human: Alive in God

by Jill Kayser

(part 1 in the  
creation series)

15<sup>th</sup> January, 2023

*This message is informed  
and inspired by Brian  
McLaren's book "We make  
the Road by Walking."*

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### Genesis 2:4-3:24 (NIV) **Adam and Eve**

On the first pages of the Bible and according to many renowned modern scientists, it all began when space and time, energy and matter, gravity and light burst or bloomed or banged into being.

In light of the Genesis story, we could say that the universe overflowed into actuality, as God the Creative spirit uttered the original joyful invitation: "let it be" and in response, light, time, space, matter, motion, sea, stone, fish, sparrow, you, me and so much more was brought into being by the Creator.

Now, some 14 billion years later, we find ourselves, dancers in this beautiful mysterious choreography that expands and evolves and includes us in all our iterations: lawyers, engineers, teachers, parents, students, shopkeepers, builders, doctors, dads, mums, grandparents, wide eyed infants. A diverse and wonderful mix of humanity, all created by an amazing and mysterious creator, offering us the incredible gift and privilege of being here, being alive, and being human.

We've just returned from a wonderful restful holiday at our bach in Omenana on the Coromandel Peninsula. Over the years of holidaying there, we have created many rituals. One ritual that I developed during the time we had our dog Dusty, was to go outside just before retiring to bed to take Dusty for a short walk to do his business before settling in for the night. This was a ritual Dusty looked forward to and one that rewarded me with a chance to gaze at the beautiful starry skies one gets in rural locations unimpeded by streetlights. I'm sure each of you has experienced something similar, and I wonder if you, like me, when looking at the vast night sky above, feel not only an amazing sense of awe, but also a humbling realisation of just how insignificant we humans are. Our issues and problems become so minor in the big scheme of things.

And yet as we read the story of creation in Genesis, we learn that God created us humans, with all our frailties, insecurities and feelings of insignificance, to represent him/she/it in this life.

Surely one of life's great paradoxes. On the one hand we are so small and insignificant, and on the other we are so important that we are invited to join the creator in the dance of life. What a reason to celebrate this great gift of being alive!

We all know the saying two eyes are better than one. Especially if we want to experience depth perception.

Two ears make it easier to locate the direction of sound and two heads are better than one because multiple perspectives contribute to wisdom.

The same is true with stories. The Bible is not one story, nor a linear factual and historical account of humanity on earth, but a fascinating library of many stories told from many perspectives. These multiple stories challenge us to see our life's purpose from a variety of angles – adding depth, a sense of direction and wisdom.

We have four Gospels introducing us to Jesus, two testaments in which the story of God unfolds and right at the very beginning we're given two creation stories to help us **know who we are, where we came from and why we are here.**

According to the first creation story, each of us is part of creation. We are made from common soil. Dust, Genesis says. As highly organised dust, we are closely related to all other living things. Together, with all living things, we share the breath of life, participating in the same cycles of birth and death, reproduction, recycling and renewal. We, with them, are part of the story of creation - different branches on the tree of life. In this story, we are connected and related to everything everywhere including God.

In the first creation story, we learn two essential truths about ourselves as human beings.

First, we are good. Along with all our fellow creatures, we were created with a primal, essential goodness that our Creator appreciates and celebrates.

And second, we all bear God's image. Women and men, girls and boys, toddlers, the elderly and teenagers, rich or poor, popular or misunderstood, powerful or vulnerable, whatever our religion or race or marital status, whatever our nationality or culture . . . we all bear God's image, no exceptions.

But what is the image of God? An image is a small imitation or reflection. So, if we bear the image of God, then like God, we experience life, through relationships.

Like God we experience love through our complementary differences.

Like God, we notice, enjoy and name things, our companions on this Earth.

Like God, we are caretakers of the garden of the Earth.

And like God, we are 'naked and not ashamed', meaning we are without fear.

Every one of us bears the image of God and it's all good!

But that's not the only story. The second creation account, which many scholars think is a much older one, describes another dimension to our identity. In that account, the possibility of 'not good' also exists.

God puts the first couple in a garden that contains two special trees. The Tree of Life is theirs to enjoy, but not the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. The Tree of Life is a beautiful image suggesting health, strength, thriving, fruitfulness, growth, vigour and all we mean by aliveness. But what might that second tree signify?

There are many suggestions, but consider this possibility suggested by author and theologian Brian McLaren: McLaren suggests the second tree represents the human desire to play God and judge parts of God's creation – not as good (as God judges it), but as evil.

So, while God's judging is always wise, fair, true, merciful and restorative. Our judging is frequently ignorant, biased, retaliatory and devaluing.

When we humans judge, we inevitably misjudge. When we humans start playing God and judging things as good and evil, we start to say this person or tribe is good and deserves to live, but that person or tribe is evil and deserves to die, or become our slaves? Before long we start to judge that this species of animal is good and deserves to survive, and that one is worthless and can be driven to extinction?

Then we judge that this land is good and deserves to be preserved, but that river is without value and can be plundered, or polluted or poisoned?

When we eat from the second tree, we soon become violent, hateful and destructive. We turn our blessing and privilege to name and know into a licence to kill, to exploit and to destroy both the earth and its people.

God sees everything as good, but we accuse more and more things of being evil. In so doing, we create in ourselves the very evil we claim to detect in others. In other words, the more we judge and accuse, the less we reflect God and the less we fulfil our potential as image-bearers of God.

So, the second creation story presents us with our challenge as human beings. The challenge of responding to our God-given freedom of choice by making the right choices.

We are given the freedom every moment of our lives to choose: Do we eat from the Tree of Aliveness - so that we continue to see and value the goodness of creation and so reflect the image of the living God? Or do we eat from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil - constantly misjudging and playing God and as a result mistreating our fellow creatures?

It's a good and beautiful thing to be an image-bearer of God. But it's also a big responsibility.

We can use our intelligence to be creative and generous, or to be selfish and destructive.

We can use our physical strength to be creative and generous, or to be selfish and destructive.

We can use our work, our money, our time and our other assets to be creative and generous, or to be selfish and destructive.

Take a look at your hand. It has the potential to make a fist in anger or it can extend in peace. It can wield a weapon, or it can play a violin. It can point in derision, or it can reach out in compassion. It can steal or it can serve.

If the first creation story is about the gift of being human, the second story is about the choice all humans live with, day after day.

To be alive in God means to bear responsibly the image of God. It means to stretch out your hand to take from the Tree of Aliveness - and to join in God's creative, healing work in this world. Amen.



**Reflection: You raise me up** (recorded song)

*Think about a time when someone played God and judged you, or a time when you played God and judged someone else. What were the effects and/or outcomes of this?*

*Think about a person who has reflected God to you in some special way. How does it feel to be around that person?*

*Take a look at your hands. Are there times where your hands have been harmful? What is something kind and creative you do with your hands?*