

Introduction

Names are important. Think of your own name. Why were you given this name? Were you named after someone? How does that impact your life? Have you had the privilege and responsibility of naming a child? What was that like?

Names are important in Scripture. They often tell us something about a person. For example, Yeshua - which is where we get the name Jesus - means deliverer or savior. Yesterday, we held a memorial service for Abram Blanken. The name Abram belonged to Israel's first patriarch, whom we know better as Abraham. After hearing so many stories from Abram's kids, grandkids, and employees yesterday, I think he was named well. Abram in Hebrew means exalted father. God changed Abram's name in Genesis from Abram to Abraham, from exalted father to father of many. Jesus renames Peter, from Petros in Greek, which means rock. After Jesus renamed him, he said that Peter was the rock on which the church would be built. Names in Scripture are important.

What's also important, in Genesis 2 especially and sprinkled throughout Scripture, is the process of naming a person, place, or animal. Like Jesus naming the disciples in our first reading today, naming someone or something is an intentional process. Genesis 2 is best read allegorically, meaning that it is a story with deeper meaning to it. There is a lot of word play in Genesis 2 that provides that deeper meaning.

There are three sections of Genesis 2 that I want to focus on this morning. In each there is a name or a process of naming, and then a corresponding responsibility for all humanity that comes with it.

The Man and the Ground

The first name is actually missing, which I never noticed before, is the name Adam. If you look back at Genesis 2, it just says “the man,” God does not name him. What’s interesting is that in the context, Adam is not a name. Adam, or *adam* is the Hebrew word for man. So, everytime it says “the man” in our text, it reads *adam* or *ha adam*, literally meaning the man.

What’s interesting about this is that there is an important play-on-words in the Hebrew. Look at Genesis 2:7, “then the Lord God formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living being.” So as we just learned, when it says man, in Hebrew it’s *adam*. The Lord God formed *adam* from the dust of the ground. But when we look at the Hebrew, we see two words in that statement that sound similar, I’ll read it in Hebrew, “*vayyitzar adonai elohim*” The Lord God formed... “*et ha adam*” the man... “*aphar min ha adamah*” “out of the dust of the ground. Did you hear that? You hear *adam* twice because the word for ground is *adamah*.

So the Lord creates *adam* out of the *adamah*. There’s a significance in this naming - Genesis 2 is telling us something more than simply God shaped a person out of some clay. There is

a special relationship between the man God created and the material from which God created the man. What is that relationship? I'm so glad you asked, let's continue.

We learn that God forms this man from the ground, breathes into his nostrils the breath of life and the man becomes a living being. Then God places him in the garden. And then the story just leaves the man there - with nothing to do - while it explains what's going on in the garden, namely there are some special trees and some special rivers.

Then, in verse 15, we revisit God's placement of the man in the garden. "And the Lord God took the man, and put him into the garden of Eden to till it and keep it."

The man now has a job. The man is a farmer. Take care of this garden that I've created is what God is telling this man to do. Take care of the material out of which I created you. Take care of the dirt, the ground.

Here's an interesting thing I learned this week. Adam's job is to till and keep the garden. There are a few translations of till and keep, many have agricultural meanings. This makes sense. But the Hebrew words used here don't have much to do with agriculture, they have to do with caring for and service. In other words, many biblical scholars argue that we could translate this as "serve and care for the garden."

Adam is formed from the *adamah*. God places Adam in a garden. God gives Adam the job of taking care of it. Adam, and humanity to follow, are called to be caretakers of soil.

Thanks to Glen Thompson, Cassie and I have a little bit of ground, a little *adamah* for us to care for and serve. Last year Glen brought us a pot, soil, and three tomato plants. This year, we got three more, and I get to practice this ancient job of being a caretaker of some soil. It's a beautiful thing. There are some things you can control, and there are things that are out of your control when you garden. But these tomato plants are like my little babies. And Glen's even worse. If you've ever received a tomato plant from Glen, you know that it's more like adopting one of his children than it is receiving some plant. Glen checks in on them a lot. In a way, God called Adam to be a good steward of the garden, and I'm called to be a good steward of these three little Glen Thompson tomato plants. Genesis 2 introduces us to the idea that humans are created with a responsibility to care for soil out of which God created us.

The Man and the Animals

The second section is the man's process of naming animals. This gives humanity a unique and responsible relationship with God's creatures.

If you have a child, think of the process of naming it. There's a lot of responsibility on you; there's a lot riding on that decision.

Cassie and I had a lot of fun when we renamed our dog. The organization that rescued her named her Elizabeth. That was a bit of a long name, too many syllables for a dog's name, and it's not very hard to teach a dog a new name. Hint: give them a treat every time they look at you when you say the new name. That'll get their attention pretty quick.

So, we started looking up names, and the process of figuring out the right name began the process of building our relationship with Ruth.

Here's where I'm going with this: in a way, having the opportunity to name our dog was an important step in growing a relationship with her. In a similar vein, I've read that it's good to name a houseplant as it gives you a stronger sense of responsibility for it. In Genesis 2, we see that with Adam. God decides that it is not good for the man to be left alone, he needs a partner. So God creates all sorts of animals and allows Adam to name them. Thus, Adam is given this responsibility to name animals; God has put humanity in the place where Cassie and I were before adopting Ruth.

Man and Woman

But of all the animals that God created and Adam named, there was not one fit to be the man's partner. And that brings us to the third name that brings together the first two. Because the man does not find a partner, God does something different. Instead of creating a partner out of the ground, as God created the first

person and all these animals, God decides to create the partner out of the first person. Bone of my bones, flesh of my flesh. And the man calls this partner woman, because out of man this one was taken. And it says that they become one flesh.

This passage has been used to defend a world where men are superior to women. On the surface, I can see where that comes from. But studying Scripture, if we want to take it seriously, and as your pastor, I want you to take it seriously, more digging is required. On the surface, it looks like man is first, woman is second. It looks like woman was created out of man and man names woman, therefore man is superior. It looks like the woman is the helper, as it says in verse 18.

Here's where a little digging is required. Let's look at the names again. The man names the woman, marking a unique relationship between the two. Just like the man and the animals. But in this case, the creation of woman changes the man in a way that the animals did not. Look at verse 23: This at last is bone of my bones, flesh of my flesh; this one shall be called Woman, for out of Man this one was taken. As I said earlier, the Hebrew word for man is *adam*. But it's not the only word for man. There is another, *ish* while woman is *ishah*. *Ish* is what's used in verse 23, not *adam*. In other words, the man's identity is changed as a result of finding a partner. I know that when I met my partner, whom I can embarrass a little because she's in the nursery, my identity changed forever.

This is further demonstrated by God's goal in creating the woman: to find a helper as the man's partner. That word for helper is not a superior vs. inferior kind of word, because 90% of this word's usage in the Old Testament is for God. Psalm 121 speaks these famous words: "I lift up my eyes to the hills— from where will my help come? My help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth." Those two words for help are the same word used in Genesis 2 for helper. In other words, God is our helper. I don't think the psalmist is thinking that God is inferior to humanity for being our helper.

Similarly, I don't think there's a relational difference between man and woman simply because woman was formed out of man. Man was formed out of the ground, I don't think the ground is superior to the man.

The best way to describe this first relationship is partnership, one of mutual responsibility and interdependence. This is why this passage is such a great one for marriage. Marriage is about partnership.

But as I prayed through this, I found that this section speaks to all people, not just married couples. Yes, it provides us with an example of marriage, two individual people becoming one flesh. But I think it also speaks to all of us, married or not. Just as the man has a responsibility to the ground from which he was formed; and the man has a responsibility for the animals which he names; the man has a responsibility for the woman who was created out of him and whom he named. I think Genesis 2 can be read in a

way that includes all humanity, not just this one man Adam. We have a responsibility for one another. We are called to love others as God has loved us.

This is crucial in the church. In our church, today is Kickoff Sunday. It is the first Sunday of the new school year. Sunday School starts today. While Genesis 2 doesn't seem like a first day of Sunday School kind of passage, the call for us to be responsible for others couldn't be more relevant than the call to raise children to know Jesus as their Savior, to learn how to read Scripture, to learn how to pray, to learn how to love God and love our neighbors. We have the responsibility to teach and raise our children well, as someday they'll have the responsibility to us to continue the work of the Gospel.

Conclusion

Genesis 2 is packed with information and details that tell us so much about God and about humanity. It tells us that God is creator, and that God was quite intentional about creating. Other religions at this time demonstrate gods creating arbitrarily and accidentally, but our God is anything but arbitrary or accidental. God created humanity, created you, with purpose. God created you with great responsibility. As we see in Genesis 2, there is responsibility to the ground from which we were formed, to the creatures that God gave us dominion over (to borrow the phrase from Genesis 1), and to one another.

There is so much more to this passage than what I can talk about during the length of a sermon. I encourage you, as we start this new year and a new time of traveling through the Old Testament, to read along during your week, asking what these passages tell us about God and about ourselves. Always feel free to email me or call me as questions or discoveries come up, and we can wrestle with the text together.

As we begin another year of exploring Scripture together, I want us to use these words from the church father Jerome about the simultaneous accessibility and mystery of Scripture. "The Scriptures are shallow enough for a baby to come and drink without fear of drowning and deep enough for theologians to swim in without ever touching the bottom." Genesis 2 shows us that we'll never touch the bottom. As disciples of Jesus, I hope we are never comfortable with simply staying at the surface of Scripture. May we always dive deeper and deeper into God's Word.