

**The Reverend Dr. Randall K. Bush**  
**East Liberty Presbyterian Church**  
**May 5, 2012, Marathon Weekend Saturday Evening Service**  
**“Earth Ethics”**  
**Genesis 2:4b-9, 15-24**

Read the scripture online: NSRV, <http://bible.oremus.org/?ql=203227572>

I have a time machine. And I went forward in time and saw that the Pirates will have a winning season. In 2025. That was too depressing, so I took my machine and went back in time. In preparation for today’s sermon, I’m pleased to announce that I managed to interview the authors of Genesis 2. I say “authors” because this creation story from the beginning of our bible was composed by a husband and wife team named Caleb and Deborah. I’m going to read you a transcript of our conversation, which I hope you’ll find enlightening.

Caleb and Deborah, thank you for taking time to speak with me today. I bring you greetings from East Liberty Presbyterian Church.

- Oh, we’ve heard of that place. It’s on the corner of Penn & Highland, right? We always thought that was a Catholic church.

Yes, a lot of people say that. Tell me a bit about your creation story.

- (Caleb speaking) Well, it all started as an exercise for our Creative Writing class. The teacher kept saying to us, “Write about what you know.” So we thought about where we live now and tried to imagine how it would be different if God re-made everything from scratch. So you start with a dry, empty landscape, which, believe me, is easy to find around here. Then you add in water – lots of water: rain from above and streams from below; pools for drinking and oceans for swimming. Next, you add the plants, trees, shrubs, flowers, a literal garden oasis in the middle of the desert. Only at the end do you add in people, and animals too—all the creatures of the world.

How many days did it take for this paradise world to be created?

- (Deborah speaking) Who knows? That other creation story has everything neatly divided into seven days, but that’s just poetic license. God is eternal and timeless, so how can you restrict what God does to some human measurement of time? In our story, creation just happened – bada-bing, bada-boom. Whether it took one day or three hundred days, who cares? We’re talking about God and creation; all the rest is just details.

In your story, you have a very active God, a God who forms “adam” out of the mud and dust of the earth; a God who plants, causes things to grow, and later walks in the garden. Tell me, is your God male or female?



- (Caleb) What kind of question is that? (No, Deborah; don't slug him. I don't think he meant anything by that.) How can God be male or female? God isn't like one of those silly idols carved out of wood and sold to tourists by our neighbors. God is both male and female, and beyond male and female. God is God: Spirit, Life, Wisdom, Love. Besides, one of your Christian teachers, Mary Daly, put it best: *If God is male, then the male is God*. Anyone who believes that would sure make a mess of things!

I hate to tell you that people have long spoken about God using male language, and part of the reason is your creation story. You seem to put "maleness" on a pedestal because you had God create man first and only later, after the animals and birds and cows and stuff, did you have God create woman.

- (Deborah) Oh, that was my idea; but most of the folks missed the point I was trying to make. I was trying to be clever. Here's God creating man and then wondering who can be a reasonable partner with man – so God creates all these other things, funny things like wombats, hyenas, tortoises, vultures, humpbacked camels, pot-bellied hogs, and Peke-a-poo dogs with those tiny little bows in their fur. Then after all that, finally God made woman, the culmination of the whole process. It was never meant to be hierarchical – as if man is better than all the creatures and woman; it was meant to be circular – in maleness and femaleness, humanity comes full circle and women are the completion of God's creative activity. I told you: It was an assignment for our Creative Writing class. Oh well, I was too fancy and people missed the point I was making. My bad.

Let's back up for a moment. As I understand it, you two wrote this creation story, in which upon a barren, dry place, God caused rain to water the earth and a garden of Eden to emerge in all its splendor. Then God blew the breath of life into man and woman as living, sexual beings – one flesh, without shame or sin – and set them in a garden paradise. But why? According to you, why do we exist?

- (Caleb) We put the answer to that right there in the story. Human beings exist in order to partner with God in taking care of the garden. Verse 15: *God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it*. What's not to understand?

Well, part of the problem is that we are no longer an agrarian-based, nomadic culture, roaming around dry, arid lands searching for drinkable water and soil with a pH balance healthy enough in which to plant our crops. We are an industrialized, modern culture, living in densely-populated urban settings organized largely according to free-market economics and capitalist forces. We aren't in the garden of Eden any more, so how can we (quote) till it and keep it?

- (Deborah) Ooh, lots of big words there; but I'll keep this simple so you can understand what we're talking about. You currently live on the planet Earth. You didn't create it. You can't even begin to fathom the complexity of this 15 billion year old place of life and wonder. Rule #1 about life on earth: There is



nothing on earth that can say to something else on earth, *I have no need for you*. Plant, animal, mineral, whatever; all things need all things. To exist is to co-exist. To be fully human, a child of God, is to understand and accept that first rule.

Second rule: To live righteously and justly is to work to promote the well-being of all. All things, not just human things. We exist to partner with God in maintaining the health and integrity, the wholeness, of this planet. We have a Hebrew word to explain what we mean by this. It's "ezer." In the story, we wrote, *It is not good that the man should be alone. I will make him a helper, ezer, as his partner*. There is nothing subordinate about this word. It is a God-like quality. Psalm 118: The Lord is on my side to help, ezer, me. Exodus 18: The God of my parent was my help, my ezer. Just as Eve is a helpmate, an **ezer** with Adam, we are created to be helpmates, **ezers**, with God. It is holy work – sacred work.

We were created to till and keep the Creator's earth. Sadly, you have become "uncreators," literally wiping off the face of the earth things made by God to last. Extinguishing creatures, flora, fauna, people – reversing the work of Genesis as if you were the ones writing the creation story for your own unholy Creative Writing course. Your story doesn't make sense because you've forgotten why you were created – namely, to be a helpmate, an **ezer**, for all life on God's good earth.

- (Caleb) I've read your whole book into which our creation story has been placed. There are some wonderful parts in the later writings about God coming to earth, how the finite was briefly able to bear the infinite. There's the powerful description of Jesus, this new Creator, who lived and suffered at the hands of you Uncreators. Yet he was restored to life. The light has shown in darkness and the darkness has not overcome it, so that the original call from Eden might go forth again.

Bottom line: To exist is to coexist. You've been made to be helpmates with God in maintaining the integrity of all life. That occupation preceded even your own creation. Those are the ethics written upon the foundation stones of this planet Earth and the ethics of the faith we share in the One Creator. Go back now and tell your friends what this story of ours is about.

I used my time machine to learn about Genesis 2. Much more could be said, but for now, may we live as God's helpmates, **ezers**, and walk gently with one another upon the rich, wonderful, fragile surface of this place we call home.

AMEN <sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Genesis by Miguel de la Torre, *Belief: A Theological Commentary on the Bible*, 2011 and Earth Community, Earth Ethics by Larry L. Ramussen, 1996.

