

The text of Genesis 2:4b-25 will feel familiar to many preachers.

In contrast to the creation story of Genesis 1:1-2:4a, this week's passage begins with the Lord God forming man (Hebrew *adam*) from the dust of the ground (*adamah*). God continues creative activity through the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, the great water sources, as well as the creation of woman and their shared state in Eden before the Fall in Genesis 3. When looking over the contents, it is easy to see how preachers have drawn on this narrative for lessons on creation, nature, and gender roles. The narrative flows well and familiar, as does the surrounding context of the six-day creation of Genesis 1 and the Fall in Genesis 3.

But as I revisit Genesis 2, I also note that the *mysteries* of the passage are equally familiar.

For starters, what in the world is a "tree of the knowledge of good and evil" in verse 10? Even as I write this commentary from education-obsessed Seoul, Korea, I ask myself what kind of knowledge leads to evil? The mystery is compounded with surrounding tension in the narrative. Genesis 2:9 states that every tree is pleasant for sight and proper for food, and again in Genesis 2:16 that God permits man to "Eat from every tree" only to get the exception in Genesis 2:17 with the warning that, "On the day you eat it, you will surely die."

The next chapter gives some clues to the nature of the tree. Adam and Eve do not die, but they do suffer a commensurate punishment. Genesis 3 gives the impression that the problem of the knowledge of good/evil is related to the divine — human separation, and thus the place of created humans in relation to the creator God. But much of the reason for the tree's existence and function in an otherwise good creation remains unrevealed.

After the introduction of the tree, verses 10-14 describe the grand rivers. But of the four water sources, three of them are enormous with huge impact of history: Tigris, Euphrates, and the Nile. Yet why is the fourth water source, the Gihon, only a tiny spring in Jerusalem? What is the passage trying to tell us about Jerusalem, and how does this relate to our understanding of the creation of the world?

Genesis 2:18-25 introduces yet another mystery, which continues to have enormous implications in Christian cultures: what does it mean that a woman is to be a "helper as a partner?" This phrase has been particularly destructive in constructing gender roles in both the household and church leadership. I recognize that one part of the problem is the of the common

English translation of “helper” for the Hebrew *ezer* carries unwarranted baggage of weakness and inferiority, as in “Daddy’s little helper.” It is important to remember that the Bible calls God an *ezer* (Psalm 54:4).

The mysteries of Genesis 2 continue:

In comparison to the earlier chapter, why does this account reverse the order of animals and human in creation (2:19)?

What does it look like for “a man to leave his father and mother and to cling to his wife (2:24)?”

And what is the association to nakedness and shame (2:25)?

And on a wider scale, how does passage make sense next to Genesis 1-2:4a? How are we to read the two passages? I have some understanding of these from both historical and theological vantage points. Historically, scholars had traditionally situated the texts as composite, arising from different periods of Israel’s history with Genesis 1-2:4a understood as a product of Babylonian exile, and Genesis 2:4b-25 arising from the 10th century Judah. (Of course, such an even dating schema is nearly universally rejected today). Theologically, I understand the tension in presenting an omnipotent, holy God in Genesis 1-2:4a next to a God who plants gardens and speaks directly to humans. Perhaps the inclusion of four different gospel accounts can help us better understand the benefits from these multiple perspectives.

But ultimately, as I consider the wonder of creation, I cannot help but also consider the wonder of this creation story. The biblical passages are there to teach us, but perhaps we learn more when we are left confused and frustrated, without satisfactory answers for our questions.

And this is perhaps a clue to the knowledge of good and evil after all. We pursue knowledge. In our Christian lives, we read, study, ponder, and strive to love God with all of our mind as we prepare to preach the Word of God. But this preparation must be prayerful. We must not forget our place as the handiwork of God’s creation. If we believe that God is so powerful, so magnificent, how can we not numbly accept our place in creation, and alongside that, embracing the mystery and unknowable aspects of God?

Consider the ramifications that humility and mystery would bring to mitigate the toxicity of present debates in Christianity considering science, gender, and marriage. Perhaps we are still trying to bite that apple, gain that place of God, and suffering for it.

Creator God, We thank you for the beauty of your Creation, and for giving us the privilege of caring for it. We confess that we have not cared for the earth with the self-sacrificing and nurturing love that you require of us. We mourn the broken relationships in creation. We repent for our part in causing the current environmental crisis that has led to climate change.

Faithful God, sustainer of all—we pray with hope, because you are already at work through Christ to reconcile all of creation to Yourself and to renew all things.

Loving God, help us to turn our lives around to be people of restoration. Help us build just relationships among human beings and with the rest of creation. Help us to live sustainably, rejecting consumerism and the exploitation of creation.

God of justice, give us courage and persistence to work for justice for those most affected by environmental degradation and climate change.

God of mercy, hear the cry of the poor who are already suffering and will continue to suffer water and food shortages and who will be displaced by climate change.

Creator God, give us your Spirit to work together to restore your creation and to hand on a safe environment and climate to our children and theirs. Let our care for creation be our act of worship and obedience to you. Your kingdom come, and your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. **Amen.**