

# Out of Nothing Comes Abundance

Genesis 1.1-2

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One of the earliest and most highly regarded Church Fathers, Origen of Alexandria, taught that there are three levels of messages found within scripture – the literal or historical, the moral, and the eternal, which he called the “spiritual.” In the year 400, a full 150 years after his death, the Church declared Origen a heretic. They did so because Origen taught, based upon his study of the Genesis 1, that God created the soul before God created the human, and post death the soul would continue to live but the body would not. For this they declared him a heretic. It is notable, however, that the Church, did not declare Origen a heretic for insisting that the creation stories were not historical documents. During Origen’s lifetime, the Church took this as a given. They understood the Creation Stories to be parable, allegory, and metaphor. I’m not sure when or where the Church’s position on creation shifted. Nonetheless, Origen taught that some stories in scripture are simply not historical. Furthermore he argued that the historical accuracy of the biblical stories, is far less important than the spiritual or eternal significance of those stories. And for hundreds of years the church agreed with him. So, with this in mind, I’d like to speak about the spiritual truths, the eternal truths, of the first Creation Story,.

But before I do that, I want to share some truly remarkable statistics with you.

- It is estimated that there are more than 7.5 million species of animals on earth - of which less than 1 million have been identified. And only one of them is human.
- There are estimated to be nearly 300,000 species of plants, which does not include the more than 600,000 species of mushrooms and fungi.

- And most surprisingly, it is estimated that there are nearly 30 million species of insects, of which more than 400,000 are different varieties of beetles.

And now I want to share a story. This comes from Mr Scott Thomas of the BrightScope Blog. His story is titled, "God's Math: A Story of Abundance." He writes,

"The year 2004 and my boys had come home from preschool and each had planted seeds and seen a small plant emerge and they were not impressed. For some reason this bothered me that the miracle of life did not excite them with a sense of wonder and what is possible. I decided to purchase mammoth sunflower seeds, a tray and some top soil for sowing. We planted 36 seeds only 33 germinated and 3 did not look like the package. About 10 days later we transplanted (the seedlings) in the ground. And within the next 3 months we had plants towering from 6 feet high to 12 feet high. While that was exciting to the boys there is more to the story. We harvested some 72,000 seeds from those 30 mammoth flowers. Next, I asked of myself and the boys what would be possible if we did the math to determine the potential of 12 months of sunflower seeds being planted again two more times? The numbers came back at 28,800,000 seeds in one year. Wow! Think about it. Are we not seeing what is possible? Are we so focused on current circumstances we do not see the potential of planting the seeds of the plant we already have in front of us. Or have we tried and failed and now question even trying again."

Our reading from Genesis this morning begins with a picture of the universe before God called it into existence. And the picture that Genesis offers us is of total, complete darkness. The Hebrew text of these first two verses conveys a complete and utter emptiness, a nothingness, a darkness that covered and consumed the fullness of the emptiness. Before life was born, there was an abyss of nothingness without even a conception of light. This first verse, if we are to linger in it, feels like an utterly hopeless situation.

And yet, by the end of the story, that which was lightless, lifeless, and hopeless, is transformed into a galaxy which is home to a lush planet pulsating with life. The dark abyss is now studded with billions of stars, it is illuminated and heated by a massive dancing ball of fire and gas, a brilliant bright face hovers in the sky each night, and there are planets yet to be discovered. Like a stone sculpture the planet is chipped, and chiseled, and smoothed by hundreds of rivers, millions of lakes, and a multitude of seas, all of which eventually meet in the seven massive oceans, God's aquatic kingdoms. The planet is swathed, wrapped in linens of tundra, prairie, plain, and forest. It is embellished with the intricate embroidery of trees and grasses, adorned with jewel toned fruits and vegetables, decorated with spectacularly shaped nuts and grains. It is caressed with fragrances of rose and jasmine, honeysuckle and wisteria, gardenia and lemon, basil and mint, coco and frankincense. And that which was once an abyss of nothingness without even a conception of light is home to nearly 40 million species of birds and mammals, reptiles and fish, insects and humans.

How did this come about? How was an abyss of nothingness transformed into a multi-dimensional canvas of living and breathing art? Though there was a darkness that covered and consumed the fullness of the emptiness, verse 2 tells us that God was in the darkness. God's breath, God's spirit was moving within and throughout and all around the dark abyss of nothingness. God's spirit was at work creating abundant life in the midst of lifelessness.

## **PAUSE**

If we study this story through the lens of spirit, as Origen instructed, seeking eternal rather than historical truths, then we cannot help but see that our holy text begins with a tomb.

*"In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, there was nothing and an extraordinary darkness covered and consumed the fullness of the nothingness, the emptiness, the abyss."*

Scripture is the story of the human experience, therefore this text is our story. The very first words uttered in Genesis are speaking an eternal truth about the human experience. The tomb, the abyss, scripture tells us, is unavoidable. To be human, fully human, requires spending time in extraordinary darkness.

If you've ever been in a deep depression, in the throes of despair, on your knees overwhelmed with fear, heaving and hyperventilating as you grieve the death of hope, then you know the darkness Genesis describes. You know consuming emptiness. You know the abyss of nothingness, the place where light does not dwell. You have been to the tomb. As wretched as it is, and it is horrid, to be human means spending time in the tomb.

The second eternal truth found in Genesis 1 is that despite how alone and abandoned we feel, we are not alone, God has not abandoned us.

“And within the abyss, God’s spirit was moving, and breathing and bringing forth life.”

The abundant life that God spoke into creation from the depths of the abyss is a promise to us, that out of our pain and suffering life, abundant life will emerge. Christ came proclaiming life, proclaiming life in abundance. Despite the magnificent miracles he performed, the wise teachings he offered, the global revolution for peace through justice that he initiated, the abundant life that Christ was speaking about, that he was promising us, came through his own time in the tomb. With full faithfulness in God, Christ committed himself to the way of God’s love and it brought him to his greatest fears, it brought him to death. It brought him to a place a place where extraordinary darkness covered and consumed the lifeless abyss.

And yet, we know how the story plays out. Genesis 1 assures us that Christ was not alone in the tomb. Within the abyss of Christ’s death, “God’s spirit was moving, and breathing and bringing forth life.”

When we are in our own tombs, we need to look to the cross and hold onto its eternal truths.

The tomb is inevitable. But the cross promises us that within our tombs we are not abandoned. Jesus, who has been to the tomb, is with you, and through him God's spirit is there, moving, breathing, within and throughout and all around your darkness.

The tomb is inevitable. But the cross promises us that the tomb is not eternal. Just as God disrupted the tomb of nothingness at the beginning of time, and disrupted the tomb of hopelessness which covered Jesus, God's will disrupt your tomb too.

The tomb is inevitable. But the cross promises us that the tomb is not futile. The tomb is where you meet God, come to understand the fullness of God's love, and find yourself starving, begging, hungering for the abundant life which Christ proclaimed.

The tomb is inevitable. And the cross promises us that the tomb is inevitable because it is the soil for true, abundant life.

The tomb of Genesis 1 is the darkness out of which the lush abundance of the natural world came to be – it is the womb out of which more than 40 million species of plants and animals were born, including the simple ladybug and her 400,000 cousins, and the mammoth sunflower, mother to of millions of offspring.

The tomb of Christ is the place from which the fullness of God was revealed – it is the womb out of which love and hope were born and through which grace, mercy, peace and power have proliferated into an eternal, universal, and timeless dominion that has been gifted us.

The tomb that is yours, the tomb you would do anything avoid, the place from which you seek escape, is the place through which God's abundant love is revealed in your own life. Scripture is your story. So, the eternal truths found in the creation story, found in Christ's death and resurrection, found in this cross, they are your truths. Your tomb is not a place of permanent despair. It is the womb through which you will experience God's love and become a witness to God's abundance.