

Creation and Place

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[0 : 00] Hi, everybody. Welcome. My name is Chris Anderson. I am the co-director of prayer with Meg Clark here at Table Church, and I am super excited to be preaching with you tonight.

A little bit about me. I am a queer Christian, cisgendered man who lives about six blocks that way. I've been going to Table for three years and have been a permanent resident of D.C. for just about the same amount of time.

By day, I am a resident chaplain over at Georgetown Hospital, and by weekend night, I like nightlife of mostly just dancing the night away at pictures.

So, learn a little bit about me. A couple of caveats before we get started. So, I come from a long line of storytellers. My family is German, Irish, British, Scottish. Some Viking in there, too.

So, I promise that the vignettes tonight will be kept to a minimum. And I'm also what they call in the Myers-Briggs an extreme extrovert or a super-e. So, I was sort of hoping that this sermon might be interactive.

[1 : 04] So, when I ask you a question, I encourage you to shout out and answer. I know that's normally not something that we often think of doing, but seriously, heckling is welcome. It's going to make this so much more fun.

So, let's start with an easy one. Favorite ice cream flavor? Vanilla cookie dough. Who said cookie dough? Nice. Hey. Vanilla, I heard chocolate. Awesome. Okay. Well, that went so much better than I thought it was going to.

You guys are amazing. Okay. Now, this is a completely unrelated but the start of our sermon question. Anyone here grow up in a family with active military? Cool. Anyone currently active military?

No? If there are, especially watching at home, thank you for all that you do. For anyone who grew up with active military or not, raise your hand if you had to move around as a kid.

Okay. Keep them up if you moved more than once. More than twice. More than three times. So, in my family, we moved five times before I was the age of 15.

[2 : 08] Voorhees, New Jersey to Hatfield, Pennsylvania. Hatfield, Pennsylvania. Lexington, Kentucky. Lexington, Kentucky. Stewartville, New Jersey. Stewartville, New Jersey. Seattle, Washington. Seattle, Washington. Doylestown, Pennsylvania. So, if you are better at math than I am, that is moving once every three years to the point where my dad got this down perfectly when we did it from Seattle.

We literally moved within a week of a three-year anniversary of when we moved out there. We grew up having to make friends quickly in my family. Peace I forgot to mention early on. I'm also a triplet. So, there are three of us. And we had to learn how to keep those friends even when there was thousands of miles of distance. And I think it's safe to say that my family gave me a heart for adventure for sure.

But it also came with some disadvantages. I never really felt stable in one place growing up. And while I was raised to be a proud Philadelphian, are there any Philadelphians in the room?

Yes. Go, birds. Go, birds. Cool. Awesome. That also worked. Believe it or not, and this is going to be a chagrin to my Philadelphians back there, I never actually got to set foot in the city of Philly until I was like 16.

[3 : 21] Because my family moves around so much. So, I grew up on like the Sixers and the Eagles, but I didn't actually know where the Liberty Bell was. So, this brings us to the point of today's sermon.

This idea of place that we've been talking about, where we are, is an integral part of our own salvation. So, here's the path for tonight's sermon.

First, we as humans are placed. And that means we're in relationship with creation all around us and at all times.

Second, when we talk about being placed in the story of salvation, this includes the actual land that we inhabit, with its natural and social history.

In our broken world, there's both obvious and subtle signs of displacement. And what we are called to do is to bring peace or shalom to those moments. Okay.

[4 : 16] So, another interactive part of the evening. When I say Washington, D.C., somebody just shout out the first thing you think of. Home. Home. Cool. Save that for later. That's awesome.

Great answer. Thank you. Give me another. Government. Government. Say again. Taipei. Taipei. Taipei. Okay.

If I said Washington, D.C. buildings, what would you think? Pentagon. Pentagon. Lincoln Memorial. Lincoln Memorial. Perfect. Okay.

All great answers, especially the last two. So, if you were to ask someone who is being a tourist here, they would probably answer those two and a few others. The Washington Monument, the White House.

Why? Why did they answer those things? Why would we answer those things? Visibility. Can you say more? They are the things that are shown.

[5 : 13] They are important symbols for this city. Exactly. Thank you. That's awesome. Now, let's say you asked someone and they answered home. Great answer. Or they answered a local haunt or the street that they lived on.

What might you say about them? They're locals. Exactly. Sorry. I promise these answers are easy. So, I want you to think for a few minutes about other famous markers from different countries.

They're going to appear right behind me. So, when they come up, just yell out where they belong to. Go ahead. Yeah. Good. Simpler. United States. But yes. Same. Good job.

Good job. Well done, everyone. Number two. Paris. France. Yes. Very good. I should have said country, but it's fine. Go ahead. London.

London. London, England. That's the Tower of London. And then fourth. Brazil. Brazil. So, funny story. This is the Christ the Redeemer. When I was preparing for this sermon, I couldn't.

[6 : 19] I was very tired. I had to write both a verbatim and a sermon in the same week. It's just a lot of paperwork. And instead of typing into Google Images Christ the Redeemer, I typed in Jesus the Magnificent.

Don't do that. Don't. No, no. No, no. So, I'm going to show you two more. You may not recognize them as much, but let's see if anybody does. Go ahead with the first one. Anybody know where this is?

Wow. Oh, that's awesome. Oh, man. Ruined the whole sermon. No, I'm kidding. This is Mauna Kea, Hawaii. This is the big island. And then the second one. Go ahead. Dang. You all are amazing.

Yes. This is the Clifton Board in Ireland. Did it appear or did somebody like legitimately been to Ireland? Has anybody been to Ireland? Oh, man. I'm way behind. I'm hoping to go at the end of next year. Right.

So, for these places, for many of us, these places might not be nearly as recognizable as the first four because they're not buildings, right? So, unless you've been there, which is amazing that so many of us have, it doesn't necessarily have the same oomph.

[7 : 24] But for the people who do live there, the communities that come from there, these last two places have extraordinary meaning. They're part of how each group understands their culture, their social location, and their mythos.

And these locations are real. Not necessarily something that was built by human hand, but that came before us. We can touch them, taste them, stand on them, or even live on them. Go ahead with the next slide.

So, I've been to one of these two. My dad retired. That's my dad, Mark. Retired to the big island of Hawaii. He lived in a neighborhood called Hawaii Paradise Park, or HPP, which is literally on the side of Mauna Kea.

And before anyone asks, no, my family does not have any Hawaiian in our lineage. So, when I went out, it was definitely as a tourist. But I was blessed because I learned from my dad, who had done a lot of research before going out there, about how to be able to respect not only the land, but the culture of the Native Hawaiian people themselves, and to become part of the wider community

there.

And I can say pretty successfully, he did so. So, the Cliffs of Moher that we saw a few minutes ago are a place of at least some of my ancestors, if not most. And I'm hoping to go there, like I said, by the end of my residency next year.

[8 : 37] And so, when we talk about place, functionally, we're thinking about two things. The first is an area's natural characteristics and its social characteristics in history.

So, let's take D.C. again for a moment. If somebody had said in their answer, Rock Creek Park, or they said the Anacostia River, you might be tempted to think, ooh, a local.

But, what if they were speaking more to the land that we're built on? Instead of a colonization perspective, a.k.a., ooh, look, we built nice things, this is ours now.

The first thing we think of is, this is the land of the Piscataway, the Pamunkey, the Nintego, the Poetan, and others. What if we thought of the neighborhoods we live in and knew the story that made each neighborhood unique?

For me, that's Mount Vernon Triangle. And it's a story of a 19th century working community that grew up with the city around it. But as it's grown, there are a lot of other neighborhoods that didn't get as much success.

[9 : 42] I'm thinking of places in our city where marginalized people and minority persons gather, as well as blue-collar communities. What if our thoughts came from a recognition that history behind a place, so that when we chose to live there, we're not just settling, and I use that word on purpose, but becoming aware of the greater narrative of a place that God has provided for us.

Okay, so that is a lot of run-up for today's scripture. Still with me? And suddenly my audio is much better. So, let's go to part two.

Place creation and salvation. We're going to be, if you have your Bibles and or phones with you, we're going to be in Genesis 1. We're going to go from the end of 1 through the beginning of 2, and then on to Genesis 2, 18 to 25.

For those who may be brand new, this is the two creation myths at the beginning of the Bible. The first is the seven-day myth. We'll read that part of that first. And then the second is the Garden of Eden myth.

So, the first, starting in Genesis 1, 28, says, God blessed them and said to them, Oh, I'm sorry. No, no, this is right.

[10 : 59] Am I missing a slide? I might be. Can we go back one? Sorry. Okay, nope, we'll go from there.

That's cool. Sorry. Sorry, y'all. So, it says, God blessed them and God said to them, Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it and have dominion over the fish of the sea, the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.

And God said, See, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is upon the face of all the earth and every tree with seed in its fruit. You shall have fruit from them for food.

Go ahead. And to every beast of the earth and to every bird of the air and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food.

And it was so. God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good. And there was evening, and there was morning, the sixth day.

[12 : 01] So, we hear in this story, God has created over five days. This is the last day of creation before he rests, and it culminates with him creating and establishing a relationship between him and man and the earth.

And notice here the connection between Adam and the land. He has dominion according to God, but how? He names the animals and the birds.

It is specifically God putting Adam in relation to the world around him. So, now we're going to move on to 2.18.

So, this is the second mythos. In this one, God has created Adam out of clay. He just breathed life or ruah into him. And he starts with God saying, So, the Lord God said, It is not good that the man should be alone.

I will make a helper as his partner. Go ahead. So, out of the ground, the Lord God formed every animal of the field and every bird of the air and brought them to the man to see what he would call them.

[13:10] And whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name. Go ahead. The man gave name to all cattle, to the birds of the air, and to every animal of the field.

But for the man, there was not found a helper as his partner. So, the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and he slept. And then he took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh.

And the rib that the Lord God had taken from the man, he made into a woman and brought her to the man. And the man said, This is at last the bone of my bones, the flesh of my flesh.

This one shall be called woman, for out of man this one was taken. Therefore, a man leaves his father and his mother and clings to his wife, and they become one flesh.

And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed. So, I want you to think for a minute about your closest friends.

[14:14] The ones who, three in the morning, something terrible has happened, or three in the morning, great news has happened. They're the first people you're going to call. Now, I want you to imagine that you had to walk up here and tell me their names, and that as you got up here, for whatever reason, you completely forgot.

Right. Completely weird, right? It would never happen. Okay. So, I am terrible with names initially. And there's a point to this.

So, when I'm at a hospital visiting patients, I often have to use lists. They literally print me out charts because I work with a lot of very kind people who understand that my brain doesn't work well. And I've had moments where I've walked into someone's room and been like, Mr. Jones, for the sake of the story, not a real name.

Okay. Mr. Jones? Oh, no, no, no. I'm Mr. Adams. Oh, I'm sorry. Nice to meet you. Now, nicest guy. Have a great conversation. These are semi-private rooms. There's someone next door.

Maybe it's this person. Hello, Mr. Jones. Oh, no. Definitely Miss McGillicuddy. I'm sorry. It's nice to see you, dear. I'll be back in a few minutes. I will tell you, this has happened three times. And each time, I've gone back to my desk an hour later.

[15:22] Still have not found Mr. Jones. Have no idea who this patient is. And so, you kind of get a perspective of me. I am very forgetful with names. So when I hear about Adam having to name all of these plants and animals, I was like, oh, my God, the pressure.

Like, really? Lord. Not me. Thank you. So when I stopped, I thought about it for a moment. If we stop and think about it for a moment, it's actually kind of beautiful. Imagine, like, God hands this beautiful red flower to Adam.

And Adam's like, huh, rose. Then he hands him this, like, fluff ball. And he's like, lamb. Then he hands him this aloof creature that only wants to be picked up when it wants to be picked up.

And Adam names it cat. He names it cat. So as tough of an idea as this can be when we live in a city like D.C.

where we're surrounded by buildings all day, we're called to this type of intimacy with our local land, too. A theologian that I did not discover until this week, thank you, Tanetta, by the name of Craig G. Bartholomew, says, and I just portrayed his name, an exploration of place will thus attend to the dimensions as natural landscape, flora and fauna, patterns of weather and sky, the human shaping of a place and its resources, the history of a place, memory, and the individual and communal narratives in which a place is enlivened.

[16:50] So that's a lot. It's basically saying that when we think about a place, it's literally everything that we were taught in fifth grade science plus kind of all the socioeconomic pieces as well.

When we think about the origin story of humanity from a Christian perspective, we see that it also takes into account all of these pieces. It places the reader as a member of the human race back with the land of the earth and the plants and the animals in it.

These stories remind us that we are intimately connected with the space around us and with God. Again, from Bartholomew, the doctrine of creation is fundamental to a theology of place.

Indeed, the failure of Christians to attend to place is owing to the eclipse of the doctrine of creation. A theology of place is rooted in the sort of theology of creation we discussed in relation to Genesis 1 and 2, which is itself fundamental to the entire biblical narrative.

The doctrine of creation resists all dualisms, which undermine the good materiality of our world in any attempt to privilege the soul or the spiritual over the material.

[18 : 04] That is a lot. That is like master's level stuff. The easiest way to think about this is if you're going to think about a theology of place, if we're going to think about somewhere that we live, we cannot deny the materiality of it.

We cannot deny where we live. We can't deny what we live on. We cannot separate it from the spiritual things. There has to be both and. At the end of the second story of creation, we hear how Adam and Eve are banished from the garden and uses the words to work the ground from which Adam was taken.

Remember I told you in the beginning of that narrative, Adam is brought from the clay and the breath of God is put in him. And now he's being sent with his wife to work the ground that he literally came out of.

The entire narrative of scripture from this point on is a turning back to God. Back to finding that harmony we once had with creation around us.

So listen to this by another theologian, Juergen Moltmann. It's God's last creation before the Sabbath. Quick pause on my end. Remember, humans are created on the sixth day and God rests on the seventh.

[19 : 16] So we are, in the first story, the last to be created. The human being himself is the embodiment of all other creatures. This complex system, human being, us, contains within itself all simpler systems in the evolution of life because it is out of these that the human being has been built up and has proceeded.

In this sense, they are present in him just as he is dependent on them. He is imago mundi. Anybody besides me ever take Latin? Do you know what it means?

I know, I had to look up mundi. I've never seen that word. It means the image of the world. And he goes on, he says, we are the image of the world.

As microcosm, the human being represents the macrocosm. In other words, the entirety of the world is narrowed down right into the human being. We represent all of the world.

As the image of the world, he stands before God as the representative of all other creatures. He lives, speaks, and acts on their behalf.

[20 : 23] Understanding that imago mundi, human beings, are priestly creations and Eucharistic beings. They intercede before God for the community of relation.

One last piece to pull out. Priestly and Eucharistic. Any other ex-Catholics in the room? Somebody Eucharistic? Good luck. Give me a good definition.

Communion. So we are both priestly, this idea of us interceding to God, praying to God, being relationship up, and then also relationship side to side. That we are both the interaction this way and this way with the world and with our creator.

That all being said, and that was a lot, I think it's safe to say we cannot have a conversation about salvation without also including the earth as part of it as well.

And for us Christians, that conversation must now include how we use and reuse our resources, how we build and sustain community, and for those of us who dwell in cities, how we understand a role in the greater history of the place that we live.

[21 : 33] Again, let's go back to D.C. for just a moment. When we ask, what comes to mind when you think of D.C.? Think of it like Adam naming the lamb or the cat. Now other answers might come to mind, right?

Adams Morgan, Georgetown, Ekington, Brookland, maybe even east of the river, rest of the river. Apartment owner versus homeowner. Places like Bennington Terrace, Berry Farm, Carroll Apartments.

Phrases like intern, congressman, type A, lawyer, nurse, executive, fry cook, mother, father, nephew, niece, student, grandparent.

Each of these tells a story of what it means to live here in the district as part of its rich history and its rich culture. And here, God allows us to participate in his plan for salvation.

I invite, there are some, I know tonight, who don't live in D.C. Those last few lines, I invite you to insert your own place here, whether it's Silver Spring or if you are watching us from a world away, just know that whatever your location is, it still applies for you.

[22 : 43] And so, the question becomes, if there is this turning back towards intimacy for all of salvation, salvation from what? It's the last part of today's sermon. So, at the hospital from time to time, I hear people talk about salvation.

I tend to try to stay away from it because it is, a landmine, but people tend to want to talk about it at a hospital. Often, the focus is usually on the person's personal salvation.

Honestly, patients and hospital staff are some of the best eschatologists in the world. Anyone know what that word means? Huh? Yes.

Or, more importantly, heaven, hell, death, and if you ascribe to it, purgatory. It is the study of the last four things. It is also the perfect word to use at a party to make people think you spend way too much money on a master's degree.

So, I will admit that in trying to stay away from those things, it is easy for me to go home at night and to not think about those things after work. It's also easy for me to ignore the situations in my neighborhood that exasperate the brokenness that my neighbors might be experiencing.

[23 : 50] this again from Bultman. Good. If human beings stand before God on behalf of creation and before creation on behalf of God, and if this is their priestly calling, then a Christian doctrine of creation, human beings must neither disappear from the community of creation, nor must they be detached from that community.

Remember how we heard earlier this idea that you cannot take the material out of the spiritual, they both exist. And this is saying the same thing. If we are both called to be priestly and Eucharistic, then we have to stand in the midst of what's there and not detach ourselves from it.

I will admit, the second one is very easy for me to do. When I came to the table three years ago, it was two days before the lockdown. It was the day of Anthony's installation.

It was going to be a party and then, whoops, the world shut down. I was, I had been called by my brother and sister-in-law six months before and they had said to me, come home.

And I was like, how am I supposed to get back to Philadelphia? I was working a dead-end non-profit job in Richmond, Virginia. Had no idea what I was going to do with my career and they both, I remember them laughing on the phone. And they're like, no, no, no.

[25 : 04] Come home. Come nearer to us. We're going to be trying to have kids. We just bought this house in Southeast. Come back to D.C. This is kind of the place you've been on and off for 15 years. So I took a shot.

I got a job at a veterinary clinic and on my day off I had typed in affirming churches D.C. And lo and behold, had, was walking up from getting lunch in Chinatown and saw the sign out front, the A-frame at the time that said, you know, come on in for five o'clock service.

Walked in and suddenly hearing the pastor using the words anti-racist and fully affirming. And I was like, wait, what's going on here? Then, the real fun part happened.

He goes, the Lord be with you. Catholics? There we go. And I went, he goes, the Lord be with you? And I went, what? I was home.

Two days later, the world shuts down. And four months later, I get the phone call that my dad has died of a massive heart attack. One of the silver linings of joining the worst club in the world is that I was for the first time able to ask myself the question, where do I want to be home?

[26 : 13] And I took some time. I took a sabbatical and literally looked at places to live and almost moved to the beach because I could. It was like, hey, let's go be a beach bum. And I ended up finding that I never really wanted to leave D.C.

So I found this tiny little studio at Mount Vernon Triangle. Knew nothing about the neighborhood. Just found this cute little place and thought, okay, let's make this home. And I've been there ever since. So as we as a community come together, drawing in as members of both Res City and Table Church into one body as we begin that process and continue that process, we also are invited to think again about the city around us.

Who are we called to help? Who is welcome at our table? For me, it's been a journey the last few years of some things as silly as like, I'm joining the board for my table, for my building because I want to meet people, which is a strange way to want to meet your neighbors.

But it's worked. I have a friend of mine who challenged me a few weeks ago to have \$20 in ones everywhere that I go, which is an obscene thing to like tell someone to do, but so that if I've ever asked for money that I can actually hand something to someone who might be in need.

That one is going okay, I guess. For us as a community, if we're going to be anti-racist, fully inclusive, justice oriented, then we also have to lean into this idea that we're called to reconnect with the people, places, and land around us.

[27 : 45] It'll take a leaning into the neighbors around us, each of us committing to meet others in and outside of our church community, doing our own work to learn the history of the district, and

getting involved.

And it's not meant just as a fix-it, but being involved in friendship and communion with those around us who live with us. I love the story in the Gospel of Luke where Jesus sends out the 72.

He doesn't say, go out and get on a soapbox and tell hundreds of people in the town you walk into about me so I can get a fanfare. He says, pick one house, go in.

If they give you peace, stay there, eat their food, thank them for their hospitality. And it might seem a little absurd, like really? You're going to ask us to just walk into somebody's house? Well, yeah, why?

Because he wanted them to start by friendship. Find one person next to them and say, hi, my name is, and start a relationship from there. And soon, neighborhoods were changing because they suddenly all knew each other.

[28 : 54] I love this saying from Sidewalks in the Kingdom by Eric Jacobs. It's the forward from it. So you go ahead, slide. Yep.

One of the seductions that continues to bedevil Christian obedience is this construction of a utopia. Whether it's fact or fantasy, ideal places that we can live the good and blessed and righteous life without inhibition or interference.

The imagining or attempted construction of utopias is an old habit of our kind. Sometimes we attempt it politically in communities, socially in communes, or religiously in churches.

It never comes to anything but grief. Meanwhile, that place we actually are is diminished or demeaned as inadequate for serious living to the glory of God. But utopia literally means no place. We can only live our lives in actual place, not imagined, fantasized, or artificially fashioned places. So what have we learned this week? Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Oh, cool.

[30 : 01] So what have we learned this week? Just like Adam, we are placed by God and we're invited to know the location, history, and people of the area we live in because they all play a role in how we understand salvation. We're called to an intimacy with the world around us, helping us to find a way to that intimacy that God once had with Adam and Eve with each other, with our world, and with God.

In doing so, we have to focus on our neighbors and neighborhoods right in front of us, allowing God to work through these connections and moments. And so, I have a challenge for you this week. Be like Adam.

I invite you to meet one new person in your neighborhood this week and learn their name. When I wrote that, I couldn't believe I was because I don't remember names well. Two, learn one new fact about the street or neighborhood that you live in and three, try to go to one local event this weekend if you can.

That is for overachievers or someone who's bored having a good time. But try to do one of these this week. See what happens. See that relationship that you start just by suddenly walking across someone and knowing their name as you see them outside.

Thank you for the chance to be with me tonight. My prayer as we go forward is that this isn't just an opportunity for us as a church to be that kind of fix or save a city that you often hear in spaces like this.

[31 : 22] But instead that this is us entering our city and that our prayer becomes Maranatha, come Lord Jesus. Dwell in us in the good things you have given to us in this city. Thank you.