

Sitting in the Gap Study Guide – October 7, 2018

[Genesis 2:18-24](#)

(Click on scripture above to link directly to the passage in the *NRSV* on biblegateway.com.)

Suggested Study / Prep

1. Read the passage(s) in several different translations and/or paraphrases (e.g. *NRSV* and *The Message*)
2. Read the provided commentary(s) below
3. Visit and explore some of the additional resources links (and/or explore your own commentaries, resources, etc)
4. Reflect on the provided questions
5. Generate your own questions and “wonderings”

Commentary on Genesis 2:18-24 (From *Homiletics*; “Global Warming”, October 6, 1991)

It is ironic that this week's Old Testament text has often been cited as evidence for the pre-eminence of male over female. Feminist biblical scholars have even tended to shy away from this "second" creation story, preferring to concentrate on the more equitable-sounding simultaneous creation of male and female recorded by the priestly writer in Genesis 1:27. But the absorbing and quixotic tale told by the less linear Jahwist author (whom Harold Bloom in *The Book of J* [1989] argues was a woman) actually intimates a much more inter-related, mutually dependent connection between these human creatures that are God's handiwork.

Verse 18 begins this story with God recognizing the fundamental incompleteness of a creation populated only by the singular man. Whereas the first creation story is noted for its assurance that after each step was completed "it was good, God's first pronouncement in this rendition is that something is "not good." The problem with this paradise is its emptiness - the man God created needs companionship. Note that God intends not just any sort of companion rather a "helper" and a "partner" is the missing component.

In verse 19 God seeks to remedy this divine oversight through the outpouring of a series of new creative energies. The creative process, however, remains basically the same - God once again uses the "ground," the earth itself, as the raw material for creation. While these new creatures share with the human a basic commonness of being, these late arrivals do not receive the additional gift of God's "breath of life." The life which animates the man comes directly from God's own nostrils. The gift of life for all other creations is "once-removed," mediated, as it were, by the divinely created ground which makes up their essence. Nevertheless, all created beings receive the gift of life from God's own hand.

As all these living things come together after their creation, God's first act is to establish them in relationship. In a sense, however, this very activity undermines the original motive behind the explosion in diversity. As the man names each of the creatures brought to him, a hierarchy of types is imposed on their relationships. In naming these birds and animals, their essential difference from the man is revealed - with each type falling below the requirement

established by God that man should have "a helper as a partner." Naming gives the man power and makes the other creatures subordinate to his will. God recognizes that true partnership in such a situation is impossible and admits having failed to solve the problem of man's aloneness and loneliness.

The Jahwist now relates God's unique answer to this technical difficulty - an entirely new kind of creative energy is necessary. Rather than molding yet another separate creature out of the dust, God establishes that the man and this new creature will share a commonality of being from inception. The essence of their partnership status is built into the genesis of their relationship. The woman is not created separately or given a separate name which would place her on a lower rung in the hierarchical ladder of creation. Physically she and the man are composed of the same stuff - they share the common elements of earthly dust and divine breath. The man himself reveals the equality of their relationship in the "naming" poem of verse 23. Whereas a name from outside themselves was imposed upon all the other creatures by the man, the integrally connected partnership of the man (Hebrew "ish") and the woman (Hebrew "ishshah") are reflected in their shared name.

Little wonder the man exclaims "At last!" when the woman's presence is revealed to him by God. The concluding verse from this week's Old Testament lesson stands as a later commentary on the preceding story. The emphasis is, once again, on the "one flesh" concept - the basic sameness, the equality of these beings which were both divinely separated in order to be divinely joined.

Additional Resources

- [The Text this Week](#) – a huge archive of commentaries, blogs, sermons, etc. Note – this site collects resources related to ALL of the lectionary texts for a given week...not all will relate to the passage(s) being studied, but many will. You will have to sift!
- Check out other commentaries available for these texts (and others!) at [WorkingPreacher.org](#).

Reflection Questions on Genesis 2:18-24:

1. Did you notice the footnotes in vv. 20-23? Before the "man" has his rib taken for the creation of the woman, the Hebrew word used is *adam* – basically translatable as "dirt person." After words, the words become *ish* and *ishshah* – "man" and "woman." The effect is generally lost in English translations, but what might these different names suggest when viewed in their original language?
2. I highly recommend the commentary by Juliana Claassens on [workingpreacher.org](#) (linked above). In it, she speaks pointedly about the dark interpretive history of this passage, especially as it has been used to justify the subjugation of women and heteronormativity. How have you traditionally heard this passage interpreted? How might this story give new light to more enlightened worldviews and modern perspectives?

What questions do you have?

What do you "wonder" about when reading this passage?