

Creating the World Through Tenderness and Holiness
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We only create the world when the world falls apart. That's the only time we have to. We have an acute sense that the world is falling apart even today: in every family experiencing loss or conflict, on every continent, in our own country. Sometimes the world is blown to bits, even, but not by alien forces or strange new threats. It's weather, mudslides, diseases, political conflicts, the constant bombardment of bad news in the media.

When our own world or the world around us feels like it's falling apart we wonder what to do next. While we wonder we tell stories. Defiant stories. Tender stories. Stories that re-create a more coherent, compassionate and hopeful world.

Dr. Richard Swanson will explore some of these stories, scattered throughout the Bible, but he will focus particularly on those stories that appear in the book of Genesis. He will inspire us to look at the ways they emerge out of a world that has fallen apart. We will consider the ways they attempt to put the world back together. And we will explore what happens when these stories are told now, in the midst of a world that is still falling apart.

These presentations are historical and theological, and that means that they are powerfully connected to contemporary life. We study history as part of our effort to understand the world we live in. We study theology in order to make sense of what we dare hope, and how we dare to go on. In these presentations we will explore ancient Jewish history, particularly the 6th century BCE when Judah was conquered by the Babylonians and taken into Exile. In the disaster of Exile, the Jewish faith struggled to respond. The catastrophe overwhelmed all previous methods of coping and left the people aimless and hopeless. The Exile could have been the death of the Jewish people, as it was the death of other nations similarly conquered.

But it was not. In the depths of Exile, the stories that became Genesis were completely reshaped, and retold. These stories, especially those in Genesis 1 and 2, provide a picture of the struggle to survive, and to return to life.

In these presentations we will examine the history of that crucial time, and we will study the stories that brought the community back to life. It is my conviction that the elements in that struggle provide a pattern for how resilience might be fostered in any century, and especially in today's world.

Session 1:

The History of Disaster:

Babylon and the Exile, and the textual traces of this catastrophe.

Session 2:

(Re)Creating the World in the Midst of Disaster:

Stories create worlds. This is true for all stories, and that makes them especially useful tools when the world has been destroyed.

Sunday Sermon:

Text: Genesis 2; The story of Adam and Eve could be blamed for millennia of discrimination against women; but is that the real meaning of this story? Come and listen to a new way of looking at it.

Sunday Question and Answer:

A brief sketch of the history and theology of resilience, followed by questions and discussion.