*12th June 2016 A very good world - Creation Cholsey*

*Genesis 1:1 – 2:3 John 1:1 – 5, 9*

*Genesis 1  1In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.
2Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.*

*3And God said, ‘Let there be light,’ and there was light. 4God saw that the light was good, and he separated the light from the darkness.5God called the light ‘day’, and the darkness he called ‘night’. And there was evening, and there was morning – the first day.*

*6And God said, ‘Let there be a vault between the waters to separate water from water.’ 7So God made the vault and separated the water under the vault from the water above it. And it was so. 8God called the vault ‘sky’. And there was evening, and there was morning – the second day.*

*9And God said, ‘Let the water under the sky be gathered to one place, and let dry ground appear.’ And it was so. 10God called the dry ground ‘land’, and the gathered waters he called ‘seas’. And God saw that it was good.*

*11Then God said, ‘Let the land produce vegetation: seed-bearing plants and trees on the land that bear fruit with seed in it, according to their various kinds.’ And it was so. 12The land produced vegetation: plants bearing seed according to their kinds and trees bearing fruit with seed in it according to their kinds. And God saw that it was good. 13And there was evening, and there was morning – the third day.*

*14And God said, ‘Let there be lights in the vault of the sky to separate the day from the night, and let them serve as signs to mark sacred times, and days and years, 15and let them be lights in the vault of the sky to give light on the earth.’ And it was so. 16God made two great lights – the greater light to govern the day and the lesser light to govern the night. He also made the stars. 17God set them in the vault of the sky to give light on the earth, 18to govern the day and the night, and to separate light from darkness. And God saw that it was good. 19And there was evening, and there was morning – the fourth day.*

*20And God said, ‘Let the water teem with living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the vault of the sky.’ 21So God created the great creatures of the sea and every living thing with which the water teems and that moves about in it, according to their kinds, and every winged bird according to its kind. And God saw that it was good. 22God blessed them and said, ‘Be fruitful and increase in number and fill the water in the seas, and let the birds increase on the earth.’ 23And there was evening, and there was morning – the fifth day.*

*24And God said, ‘Let the land produce living creatures according to their kinds: the livestock, the creatures that move along the ground, and the wild animals, each according to its kind.’ And it was so. 25God made the wild animals according to their kinds, the livestock according to their kinds, and all the creatures that move along the ground according to their kinds. And God saw that it was good.*

*26Then God said, ‘Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.’*

*27So God created mankind in his own image,
    in the image of God he created them;
    male and female he created them.*

*28God blessed them and said to them, ‘Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground.’*

*29Then God said, ‘I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food. 30And to all the beasts of the earth and all the birds in the sky and all the creatures that move along the ground – everything that has the breath of life in it – I give every green plant for food.’ And it was so.*

*31God saw all that he had made, and it was very good. And there was evening, and there was morning – the sixth day.*

*2 1Thus the heavens and the earth were completed in all their vast array.*

*2By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work. 3Then God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done*

*John 1 1In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2He was with God in the beginning. 3Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made.4In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. 5The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.*

*9The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world.To all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God*

*14The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us.*

Intro
Some of the biggest, deepest questions we sometimes ask ourselves, especially in those quiet moments when we have time to reflect, revolve around what is the meaning of life: *Who am I ? Why am I here? Is there a meaning and purpose to my life?*

And sometimes we extend those questions even wider:
*What is our world - our universe - and why is it here?
Is it just random chaos or does it have a purpose?
Is it possible to make sense of it?*

These questions have always been asked and this magnificent, ageless opening passage of Genesis seeks to answer those profoundly important questions. For the people who first heard this account of creation the world was a very frightening place: not just a place in which it was difficult to survive with earthquakes, storm and flood, but the creation myths of the day talked about capricious unpredictable gods battling it out with each other, or huge monsters and man just being a helpless pawn caught it up in the middle.
The Genesis account was never meant to be simply about *how* we and our world came into being, but rather seeking to answer the deeper questions of *who* we are and *why* we are here.
Nor was Genesis ever meant to be taken literally in a strictly scientific way – it is written more like a poem which everybody can understand and which permeates our understanding, our imagination and our hearts.

We see its poetic rhythm: with the 7 days and the repeated phrases: *And God said; …and it was so And God saw that it was good; And there was evening, and there was morning – the first day etc.*

Genesis 1 tells us how God brings order out of chaos. Creation in stages:
Days 1 to 3 - forming the creation, everything necessary to give us a habitat to live and thrive in.
*Day 1 - Light and darkness; Day 2 - the sea and the air; Day 3 - the dry land and all the vegetation*
Days 4 – 6: filling each part of this creation in turn
*Day 4 - filling the cosmos with the stars, planets, sun and moon.
Day 5 - filling the sea with the fish and all the creatures of the sea, and the air with the birds;
Day 6 - filling the land with animals and eventually human beings*

But to go back to the beginning – with the majestic opening words:
*In the beginning, God* – God is beyond time, beyond our universe,
the creator of everything and therefore the ruler of everything.
*If I make something: paint a painting, write a poem, throw a pot, it is mine and I can do what I like with it. So if God made us, we are his and he is our ruler our King.*

No scientist can really explain the beginning of our universe, although nearly all agree now that it had a definite beginning *Big bang* about 14 billion years ago. But no-one can explain what caused *Big bang* or
why our universe has evolved in such a remarkable way as to develop precisely the right conditions for life to emerge. The odds against it happening are trillions of trillions of trillions to one. The only explanation that atheist scientists like Richard Dawkins, have to offer is that there are trillions and trillions and trillions of universes and we just happen to live in the one that has all the right conditions for life. But even that explanation does not explain where the trillions and trillions and trillions of universes came from. So in fact, it actually takes far more faith to be an atheist and believe this all happened by chance than to believe in an all-powerful eternal God who designed and created our extraordinary and beautiful life-giving cosmos.

Genesis 1 tells us God is an all-powerful Creator – He creates simply through his word. *And God said… and it happened* He only has to think the idea and it happens
*c.f.Versailles Louis XIV*

God’s word brings life. Millennia later, the apostle John would write:
*1In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God… 3Through him all things were made; 4In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind ….* John had come to realise that this all powerful life-giving word is none other than the 2nd person of the Trinity i.e. Jesus
*Then v.14 The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us*So no wonder, Jesus the Word of God is *the way, the truth, the life,*who said:  *I have come that you might have life and life in all its abundance.* If we want to be fully alive, we need to centre our lives on Jesus, the Word of God

Everything that God makes is good. At the end he says it is all *very* good. And then He blesses all the animals and man.
We do not live in a cold, meaningless universe which down through the ages has been such a frightening place for pagans and even today for any atheist who actually stops to think about the implications of his beliefs,
it can be appallingly scary
Rather, we live in *a good universe made by a good God for our blessing* and nurture. It was actually this Biblical belief that enabled modern scientific study to get started. i.e. because people were confident that the world was created by a good God they were confident that it worked according to laws which could be discovered and understood.

Man is the pinnacle of God’s creation *(although half the population might say God realised he hadn’t got man quite right and so he created woman):* The process of creating man seems to be slightly different:
Rather than *Let there be…* God now says: *Let us make* suggesting an even more personal involvement by God *(like a chef’s piece de resistance)*– after all He is creating man in his own image (not so much physical as spiritual – like God we have the capacity to speak, plan, create, love, decide, forgive – we have free will)
and so in chapter 2 we see God forming man from the dust of the earth with his own hands and breathing his spirit into him – a very intimate process

Man is part of God’s creation (made on the same day as the animals)
He’s made out of the dust of the earth (a poetic picture of physical evolution)
and yet he is distinct – we are much more than naked apes because uniquely God has breathed his own Spirit into us to make us into his own image. This means above all man has the capacity to love, for
*God is love (the Trinity is a circle of love)* so *we* are made to love –
to love God and to love one another *(c.f. parents having children)*(The one thing that God says is *not good* in his creation is man being alone and so he makes woman)

So, Why are we here? First of all to love God – *remember that beautiful allusion in Genesis 3 to God and Adam walking together in the garden in the cool of the day -* and to love one another – this is the meaning of life. But secondly, we are given by God the job of *ruling* over his creation. But note what God says:
*Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule*This means our *ruling* is meant also to reflect God’s image, we are called to rule like God rules - not exploiting creation ruthlessly, but ruling it with love and care; bringing order and taking care of, and blessing

This series is called *Promises kept -*  so you might ask: *What is the promise here in Genesis 1?* It is surely that mankind will be blessed.
But if that is the case, *why is the world in such a mess?*
Next time we will look at this in much more detail but meanwhile, Genesis 1 tells us *Yes God really does care about us and wants to bless us.* However, it is only as the history of God’s people and the story of God’s grace unfold we see how God’s promise to bless mankind is kept - supremely in the coming of Jesus.

*This is what John wants to tell us:* that the Word who was there
*in the beginning* and through whom the universe and mankind was created, has now entered his own Creation in the flesh *(like an author entering his own story)*.

Yes, the world had become a mess, through man’s rebellion and sin, but the God who created us and wanted to bless us from the very beginning, has not abandoned us but became a human being - one of us - in Jesus in whom the image of God is seen – perfect and unspoilt - *precisely so that He could redeem not only us - but his whole creation*

The God who in the beginning breathed his life-giving breath, his Spirit, into the first Adam to make him a human being, has come as a second Adam to rescue and redeem us, to breathe his Holy Spirit into us and to re-create us in his image. As John says: *to all those who received Jesus, He gives the right to be born again as children of God.*

Who am I? I am not just a random product of chance but rather
a precious child of God, created in his image, whom God loves and longs to bless. So much so, that even when we make a complete mess of things, God steps in to redeem us, re-create us and make good his beautiful creation.

Why am I here? We know that when someone discovers their true vocation, what they are created to do *(viz an athlete, a singer, an artist, a doctor)* this is what will make them truly happy.
We all have particular vocations, but *Genesis 1* shows us there
a deeper vocation that is true for everyone: it is not just to survive or pursue selfish gain (which turns out not to be a path to happiness anyway) - rather, it is to know and love God, to show his love to others, and to help bring his order, his loving just rule - his *kingdom -* into our world.
If we truly understand and accept that calling, it is the most fulfilling thing in the world.

So this is what we need to know and understand:
this is what our neighbours need to know and understand;
this is what you and I need to share with them.