

*“Creating Community”*  
Rev. Dr. Brandon S. Perrine

*<sup>18</sup>Then the LORD God said, “It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper as his partner.” <sup>19</sup>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; and whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name. <sup>20</sup>The man gave names to all cattle, and 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.*

*<sup>21</sup>So the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and he slept; then he took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. <sup>22</sup>And the rib that the LORD God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man. <sup>23</sup>Then the man said, “This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; this one shall be called Woman, for out of Man this one was taken.”*

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One day in the Garden of Eden, Eve calls out to God, “Lord, I have a problem!” “What’s the problem, Eve?” God asks her. “Lord,” she says, “I know you’ve created me and have provided this beautiful garden and all of these wonderful animals, and that hilarious comedic snake, but I’m just not happy.” “Why is that, Eve?” comes the reply from above. “Lord, I am lonely. And I’m sick to death of apples,” she says. “Well, Eve, in that case, I have a solution. I shall create a man for you,” the good Lord tells her. “What’s a ‘man’, Lord?” she inquires. “This man will be a flawed creature, with aggressive tendencies, an enormous ego and an inability to empathize or listen to you properly. All in all, he’ll give you a hard time. But, he’ll be bigger and faster and more muscular than you. He’ll be really good at fighting and kicking a ball about and hunting fleet-

footed ruminants, and not altogether bad in the love department.” “Sounds great,” says Eve, with an ironically raised eyebrow. “Yeah, well. He’s better than a poke in the eye with a burnt stick. But, you can have him on one condition.” “What’s that, Lord?” she asks. “You’ll have to let him believe that I made him first!”<sup>1</sup>

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For centuries, maybe even millennia, this morning’s text and the verses that immediately follow them—the ones about the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, and a crafty snake, and a bite of forbidden fruit, and the banishment of the man and woman from the garden forever—these verses have been used to justify and even promote a number of really nasty attitudes about, behaviors toward, and expectations of women.

South African Hebrew Bible scholar and commentator Juliana Classens points out that over the years, the reference to the woman as man’s helpmate has been invoked to relegate women to a subservient position. Or worse, the 15<sup>th</sup> century document *Malleus Maleficarum*, a manual for dealing with women who have been accused of witchcraft, offers this shocking interpretation regarding the reference of woman being created from the rib of the man:<sup>2</sup>

*But the natural reason is that she is more carnal than a man, as is clear from her many carnal abominations. And it should be noted that there was a defect in the formation of the first woman, since she was formed from a bent rib, that is, a rib of the breast, which is bent as it were in a contrary direction to a man. And since through this defect she is an imperfect animal, she always deceives.*<sup>3</sup>

I wonder, does any of this make you mad? It should. It should make all of us mad. This text wasn’t written to fuel millennia of male dominance or female oppression. This text, and the Bible as a whole, is a text about faith—about the human relationship with the divine, about the human place in the cosmos, about God’s love for the creation.

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<sup>1</sup> “Eve was first?” Jokes.one, <https://jokes.one/joke/eve-was-first>.

<sup>2</sup> Juliana Classens. “Commentary on Genesis 2:18-24,” Workingpreacher.org, October 7, 2018, [http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary\\_id=3792](http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=3792).

<sup>3</sup> Heinrich Kramer, “Malleus Maleficarum,” Sacred-texts.com, <http://www.sacred-texts.com/pag/mm/>.

In this ancient account of creation, one of two creation stories found in the first chapters of the book of Genesis, God notices that the human God made is lonely. The man needed a partner, a helper. The word translated ‘helper’ is used throughout the Hebrew Bible as a term for God and God’s role as the ‘helper’ of ancient Israel. Since God is also a helper, then that either means that God is female or that the word ‘helper’ doesn’t refer to the gender of the partner God was seeking for the man.

Either way, our text says that God reached into the same dirt that God used to form the man and makes the animals. Still unsatisfied, God reaches into the man, takes part of his side and forms a second human, a woman, from a piece of the first. I don’t know about you, but I think there’s something profoundly beautiful, even transcendent, in the idea that each human carries within themselves a part of the humans that preceded them. After all, that’s just how biology works. We all carry genetic pieces of our parents and grandparents and ancestors from centuries and millennia long past.

It’s a lovely story, at so many levels, but this is not a text that’s meant to prescribe roles for men and for women. Granted, there are layers of meaning in this here, but this morning I want to lift up a simple, profound, and timeless message. “It is not good for humans to be alone.” We are made for community. That is, I believe, the central message of this text. Community is a basic human need and the ancient authors of this rich story understood that. And it’s just as true today, in our time of broadening virtual connections and after the period of isolation we’re just now emerging from, as it was when these words were first set to paper, or papyrus, or stone, or whatever they were written on. Human beings are made for community.

Sometimes, though, we mistake community for the place where we live or the neighborhood we live in. It’s more than that. Last week in our children’s time, I shared that a community is group of people who are connected to each other by relationships, things they care about. In a community, I explained, people care about each other and help one another. The truth is, community is less about proximity and more about relationship.

Speaking at a rally following the Supreme Court decision that desegregated buses in Montgomery, the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. told the crowd that “noncooperation and boycotts are not ends themselves . . . The end is redemption and reconciliation. The aftermath of nonviolence is the creation of the beloved community.” Beloved Community—that’s how King described the sort of relationships that human beings are capable of. His was a global vision, in which all people share in the earth’s gifts; poverty, hunger, and homelessness are eradicated; racism and all forms of discrimination, bigotry, and prejudice are superseded by a spirit of universal kinship; disputes are solved by peaceful means; love and trust triumph over fear and hatred; and peace with justice prevail.<sup>4</sup>

King’s vision of the Beloved Community sounds a lot like Jesus’ own vision of human community. He called it “the Kingdom of God.” When Jesus preached about the Kingdom of God, he wasn’t talking about a spirit-realm where souls live on after their bodies die. He was talking about a real, time-and-space in-breaking of heavenly values, and a resulting human community built on those values. In the Kingdom, everyone would be welcomed, everyone would be loved, everyone would have enough, everyone would be treated with love and dignity, everyone would experience peace.

Both, the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and Jesus of Nazareth, had visions for a human community that could be realized in the world. And both visions were built on a common foundation: relationship. Relationship is vital for real, lasting, loving community.

At some level, we at New England Church get the idea of community and have felt the call to Christian community. Each week we gather together in this place to join our hearts and our voices in ancient words and rituals. Inspired by the example of Jesus who calls all children to him, we welcome one another and the guests in our midst. We walk life’s many roads with one another. We support and uphold one another on the journey. And it’s good. But we are called to more than that. We are

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<sup>4</sup> “The Beloved Community,” [Thekingcenter.org](https://thekingcenter.org/about-tkc/the-king-philosophy/), <https://thekingcenter.org/about-tkc/the-king-philosophy/>.

called to join the work of *creating* the Beloved Community—the Kingdom of God—right here, right now, for all. Human beings need *this* kind of community. We need it in the microcosms of our families, our neighborhoods, and this church. We need it in the macrocosms of our city, our nation, and our world. Human beings need this kind of community.

And so today, as we live another day in a divided city and state, a divided nation, and a divided world, I wonder what barriers need to be broken down in order to start building the Beloved Community—the Kingdom of God. I wonder, what small part, or large part, each of us might play in building that kind of community right here, right now, and for all. I wonder, will we do it?

May it be so. Amen.