



## God and Creation: The Abundance of God's Goodness

### Theology Statement

What does it mean to believe in God? What do people of faith believe about God? What can the world around us tell us about God? These questions are especially difficult and complex today as popular conceptions of God still rely on an image of an old white man with a long, flowing beard. In an age when science and technology promise to answer all of our questions about the world, there seems to be little need for faith in God, and many of the traditional images of God no longer speak to our cultural situation. Yet the hunger for God, and for believing in God persists. More and more we are recognizing that science alone cannot solve all of our problems nor respond adequately to our hunger for spiritual communion. Christians believe God created all there is, the heavens and the earth, and created each of us in God's own image.

Anglican Christians also take seriously what the writer of Genesis, the very first book of the Bible, makes clear: what God creates is good, *very* good, without qualification. We need not reject developments in science to hold these beliefs about God and God's creative work. Indeed, science can help us to better understand the ongoing creativity of God in the world, and appreciate the vast diversity of that creativity all around us.

Anglican Christians in particular hold fast to this belief in the goodness of God's creation, and we actively seek scientific insights about how the world works as a way to learn more about God's ongoing creative work. We also take seriously the fundamental claim that *each and every* human being is created in God's image. Among the many aspects of our lives that might reflect the divine image, Anglicans particularly value our ability to reason, our creativity, and our longing for relationship—each of which reflect an aspect of God's own divine life.

In the Episcopal Church today you will find both practicing scientists and great artists, computer technicians and gardeners, all of whom, in their individual creative acts, reflect the divine creativity of God, in which we are all invited to participate. When Christians talk about God as Trinity (Father, Son and Holy Spirit), part of what we mean is that the divine reality is itself relational and social. Human beings are also deeply social creatures, which is another aspect of God's image in us. As creatures made in the image of this social God, we hunger for communal forms of spirituality, which we seek to build in the Episcopal Church.

This hunger for community leads Episcopalians week by week to the Eucharistic table. At that table we present to God from God's own creation the fruit of earth and vine, the bread and wine of communion. In return, God feeds us with God's own life, giving us a foretaste of the fullness for which we yearn and which God intended in creation.

So, believing in God in the Episcopal Church does not require believing in an old white man with a long, flowing beard. God is the source of life, the lover of our souls (the bread and wine of communion) and the hope to satisfy our hunger.

## Take-Home Material for Session Two

The work of the Gospel calls us to go out into the world, to take the learning, prayer, and spirit of the community to the people of God who are not gathered in our community. This week, as you reflect on your experience, here are some resources to focus your meditation, prayer, and study. You may have time to do all of these things during your week. You may only have time for some of the suggestions. Whatever you do, please keep the members of your small group in your thoughts as you carry out your work.

*Outline of the Faith* (Book of Common Prayer, pg 846)

### **God the Father**

Q. What do we learn about God as creator from the revelation to Israel?

A. We learn that there is one God, the Father Almighty, creator of heaven and earth, of all that is, seen and unseen.

Q. What does this mean?

A. This means that the universe is good, that it is the work of a single loving God who creates, sustains, and directs it.

Q. What does this mean about our place in the universe?

A. It means that the world belongs to its creator; and that we are called to enjoy it and to care for it in accordance with God's purposes.

Q. What does this mean about human life?

A. It means that all people are worthy of respect and honor, because all are created in the image of God, and all can respond to the love of God.

Q. How was this revelation handed down to us?

A. This revelation was handed down to us through a community created by a covenant with God.

*Prayer for the Week* (Book of Common Prayer, pg 827)

### **For Knowledge of God's Creation**

Almighty and everlasting God, you made the universe with all its marvelous order, its atoms, worlds, and galaxies, and the infinite complexity of living creatures: Grant that, as we probe the mysteries of your creation, we may come to know you more truly, and more surely fulfill our role in your eternal purpose; in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

### *Scripture for the Week*

Now the boy Samuel was ministering to the LORD under Eli. The word of the LORD was rare in those days; visions were not widespread. At that time Eli, whose eyesight had begun to grow dim so that he could not see, was lying down in his room; the lamp of God had not yet gone out, and Samuel was lying down in the temple of the LORD, where the ark of God was. Then the LORD called, "Samuel! Samuel!" and he said, "Here I am!" and ran to Eli, and said, "Here I am, for you called me." But he said, "I did not call; lie down again." So he went and lay down. The LORD called again, "Samuel!" Samuel got

up and went to Eli, and said, “Here I am, for you called me.” But he said, “I did not call, my son; lie down again.” Now Samuel did not yet know the LORD, and the word of the LORD had not yet been revealed to him. The LORD called Samuel again, a third time. And he got up and went to Eli, and said, “Here I am, for you called me.” Then Eli perceived that the LORD was calling the boy. Therefore Eli said to Samuel, “Go, lie down; and if he calls you, you shall say, ‘Speak, LORD, for your servant is listening.’” So Samuel went and lay down in his place. Now the LORD came and stood there, calling as before, “Samuel! Samuel!” And Samuel said, “Speak, for your servant is listening.”

**I Samuel 3:1-10** New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

### *Journaling*

Journaling is a good way for adults to pay attention to their faith lives. You are encouraged to journal so that you can consider the questions that develop during our time together. As with other prayer disciplines, it often helps to pick a time to write in your journal each day, setting it aside in some way. The question to think about as you write this week appears below.

### *Reflection for the Week*

In the video you watched today, the Rev. Mark Bozutti-Jones speaks about our reciprocal relationship with God. If God is Creator, then we are Co-Creators. If God is Redeemer, then we are Co-Redeemers. If God is Sanctifier, then we are Co-Sanctifiers. *How does God involve you in God’s work in the world?* As you return to the world this week, you might want to begin writing in your journal on this question.

## **Notes on Anglican Worship**

You have begun to wrestle with several of the questions that have been the subject matter of some of the most intense debates, between the greatest minds in Western philosophy, for the last two thousand years. This is not easy work; this is theology. There may have been voices in the video and ideas in the curriculum which you found to be mirrors of your own ideas about what it means to be a Christian, others which were small epiphanies, and others still which strayed so far from your conception of Christianity that they seemed offensive. This is exactly what is meant by Anglican theology; in valuing a great diversity of perspectives, we are sure to come across views that differ radically from our own.

This is not the downside of Anglicanism; it is our greatest asset. We are able to respectfully discuss our differences, neither blindly accepting one perspective as true, nor discounting someone who differs greatly from our own. In this respectful conversation, we are able to share our individual faiths, and in so doing, build a faith community which becomes a whole much greater than the sum of its component parts.

While this gathering together can be done in many ways, the time when all of our discordant voices emerge in one harmonious song is worship. When we come together in the same place to meet God in community, we are saying that our individual differences do not separate us from one another, but bring us together. In gathering within the walls of a church, we are all sincerely seeking out the loving God, who calls to each of us in a unique way. In our forms of worship, called liturgies, we are neither simply making something pretty, nor repeating a litany of empty phrases and a sign language of nonsensical gestures; we are creating a space outside of the cares of our day-to-day lives, a time-out in which we can focus, both in mind and body, on coming to understand God. This both brings us closer to our individual spiritual centers, and gives us a secure spiritual footing, from which to leap back into the world, energized to do God's compassionate work in a spirit of love and joy.