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Every time I move into a new home, I wonder where I will have my workshop. Sometimes it's in the basement, tucked away in a space amidst boxes and storage items. Other times I hang my tools on pegboard in a corner of the garage, knowing that when I want to work on a project I have to move the car outside. Through the years I've refinished furniture, built dollhouses, created pictures from various colors of wood veneer, recanned the seats of old chairs, restored old clocks, built bunkbeds, and created a variety of other projects. There's something about being creative that soothes my soul, that taps into an energy that brings renewal.

Sometimes when I begin creating something, I draw out plans on paper in order to know what supplies I will need to purchase at the hardware store: 2x4s or 1x3s, wood stain or paint, nails or screws. At other times I just look around my workshop and use whatever I happen to have on hand for my project.

I wonder how much God had in mind when creating the world in God's workshop—what God had to work with to create what we see today. If we

originated from a Big Bang, there wasn't much material to work with in the beginning moments of the universe, for everything was packed into a very small space. Lots of stuff emerged in the early seconds of the Big Bang for God to use creatively. Maybe God saw the Big Bang and said, "Here's some great stuff. Let's build a universe. It may take a long time, but hey, I've got time to wait and see what happens."

Just as we wonder today how we were created, our ancestors thousands of years ago pondered the same questions: How did we get here? How were we created? What are we to do?

In response to these questions, we have the beautiful poetic description in Genesis 1—not a scientific description, but one that celebrates God's relationship with the world. The writer describes the process of the unfolding of our world—beginning with a hint of light separated from the darkness, then sky and earth, light of the sun and moon and stars, life from creatures and plants, and finally us humans, followed by a time of rest. I find it interesting that when describing the process of

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creation, God’s creative action begins before the light of the sun and moon. And did you notice—the writer ended each creative day by saying “there was evening and there was morning.” It almost sounds as though God was creating in the dark before the morning hours, even before the light of the sun and moon.

It’s as though the director calls out “Action!” even before calling for “Lights!” I know this order sounds a bit backward. I was reminded this week of the confusing order when someone commented on my sermon title, “Pastor Doug, are you sure that’s what you want to call your sermon: ‘Action! Camera! Lights!’? Don’t you know it’s supposed to be ‘Lights! Camera! Action!’”?

Well, yes, I know the traditional order of the words, but the creation story seems backwards, starting with actions that come before the light of the sun and moon, with God creating in the darkness of the evening before the morning light.

As I thought of God’s creative process in the beginning, I realized I sometimes feel as though I’m creating in the dark. I don’t always know what I’m

creating until I begin. Have you ever felt that way? Not knowing what you’re doing? Ever felt as though others expect you to know what you’re creating even when you’re in the dark?

I felt that way recently when I went to an art class to learn how to use pastels. I had never used a pastel before—didn’t even know what they were, so I had no idea what I was doing. I listened to excellent instructions from a gifted artist about shading and blending colors, and then the teacher invited us to try and create a picture. While everyone else was drawing and creating, I sat there confused, unsure where to begin. Finally the instructor suggested, “Just try drawing something. See what happens.” I felt as though I was creating in the dark, unsure what to do, but by the end of three sessions I had created something that others saw as beauty.

Oftentimes I think we’re afraid of being creative, unsure whether to take the risk of trying something new. We worry that others might not like what we make, that critics will make hurtful comments. And so many times we go through life in the shadows,

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hiding our creativity in the dark, afraid of the morning light.

When we finally step into the light of life and begin creating, we're bound to get stuck sooner or later. As dancer Twyla Tharp says in her book on creativity

There will come a time when your creativity fails you. You stare at the canvas, the screen, the keyboard, the empty room—and it refuses to meet your eyes. It looks away as if it's ashamed of you. You may as well be painting on shards of broken glass. Your screen shows nothing but wavy lines. Your fingers slip off the keyboard, never getting traction. The room turns dark and cold.¹

Sometimes we might get stuck because we're not sure it will turn out right. I wonder if God hesitated before creating. What if God paused and thought, *I'm not sure this creation plan is a good idea. What if something goes awry? I've thought about making creatures on the earth with whom I can love. What if they don't listen to me? What if disease enters their bodies and they suffer? They*

might be angry that my creation isn't perfect. What if winds and water form in ways that destroy part of what I've created? What if the ground moves after I've made it, and when the earth quakes people get hurt? What happens if my gift of fire gets out of hand and burns their forests of trees? Will people be angry that my creation isn't perfect? Is the pain they could suffer worth the life that I could create?

When you and I are having a bad day, or when natural disasters continue to wreak havoc on our world, we might ask ourselves: *Would no creation at all be better than a creation filled with things that go awry? Or we might wonder, Is the pain that enters our lives worth having each moment of joy?*

Buried in each day of the creation story a repeating word gives us a hint to this dilemma. Did you notice that six times, at each creative moment, God noticed that, "It was good"? But on the last day, after creating humans, God celebrated that "It was very good." God created everything good, but you and I are very good. We are filled with what the Hebrew called טוב (*tov*), meaning goodness,

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precious, pleasant, and even beautiful. Yes, we all know that sometimes things go awry, but God does not send chaos or destruction into the world. God does not send floods or hurricanes or earthquakes as punishments into the world. Nature has a power of its own that goes astray and sometimes forces collide with those of us who live here.

In the midst of the good world that God created, we also realize it's not a perfect, something we have especially observed over the past week: from hurricanes in the Atlantic Ocean to wildfires in numerous western states to an earthquake in Mexico. Many have died. Many have lost their homes.

As news reports continue to explore the tragedies in these places, and as we hear cries for help, we may begin to experience compassion fatigue as we realize we can't help every person and

as we feel overwhelmed with the cries of help. We may find ourselves stuck, unable to find creative solutions to the chaos that swirls in the world. Even though we know God's creation is a good thing, we may feel as though we're in the dark, unable to see how to create healing or relief. It's in these moments that God's light can break into the lives of ordinary people, inspiring many to reach out in creative ways.

We have no idea how our gifts to Week of Compassion will touch those lives in pain. We don't know where clean up buckets filled with supplies will make a difference. And yet, we know that God's light will continue to shine in those places of despair—that in the darkness God's light continues to reflect a glimmer of God's hope.

¹ Twilya Tharp, *The Creative Habit: Learn It and Use It For Life*, 184.