

Adam and Eve

A sermon preached at Niles Discovery Church, Fremont, California,
on Sunday, June 28, 2026, by the Rev. Jeffrey Spencer.

Scripture: [Genesis 2:4-23](#)¹

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The house I grew up in didn't have a back yard so much as a back dirt. It was on the north side of the house, and it was surrounded by old (and tall) maple and oak trees, and a locust tree that shed long, dark brown seed pods. Very little sunlight got to the back yard, so no grass grew. And that meant my siblings and I didn't need a sand box. We had the back yard's dirt to play in.

I don't know how many imaginary miles of road my brother and I built with Tonka trucks and garden trowels. The spigot for the hose was on the south side of the house, so I don't think making mud pies happened all that often. I certainly don't have memories of doing so. What I remember is the dirt as being dry and dusty. I suspect it wasn't very fertile. I don't remember coming across earth worms or other bugs as I recreated the story of *Mike Mulligan and His Steam Shovel* or built highways like a miniature version of the Everett Turnpike.

While I don't remember the back yard dirt having a smell, I do remember, as a teenager digging a hole in the neighbor's yard so she could plant a rhododendron. I remember the sound the shovel made as it cut through the sod and into the dirt. And I remember that as I turned over the shovel-full, the soil released a smell, a rich combination of decay and life.

That's the kind of rich soil I image as I read this second creation story in Genesis, the creation story we heard today, especially the part about God creating the "earth creature," as *The Inclusive Bible* translates the Hebrew. I think this is one of the best English translations of the Hebrew. The creature God creates, the *adâm*, is a Hebrew word derived from *adama*, which means earth, dust, or soil. The *adâm* was created from the *adama*. The earth creature was created from the earth. In verse 5 when we read, "there was no human being to till the soil," we miss the Hebrew pun. The Hebrew says, "there was no *adâm* to till the *adama*." A similar play on words in English, with a similar etymology, would be human and humus.

Unfortunately, this story has been used to oppress women. Genesis 2:18 is typically translated as "Then the LORD God said, 'It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper as his partner.'" "A helper." For centuries, men have assumed that this means the partner God creates next is to *serve* the creature that is created first. Their emphasis is on the "helper" and they ignore the "partner."

So God goes about creating the other creatures, the "beasts" and the "birds," and presents each one to the earth creature to name and to figure out if this is an appropriate partner, an appropriate companion. And the answer, each time, is "nope" or "not quite."

¹ We actually read from [The Inclusive Bible](#) translation, but an online version of that translation is not available. As you get into the sermon, you'll see why I preferred this translation.

Even though each of these other animals is created from the *adama*, even though all of the other animals are earth creatures in their own way, they still aren't quite the appropriate companion.

'Making these other creatures the same way I made that first earth creature isn't quite doing what we need,' God seems to conclude. So God made the earth creature fall into a deep sleep and (here's a literal translation) "while the earth creature (the *adâm*) slept, God took one of its sides [or possibly, ribs] and closed up the flesh in its place. Then Yahweh made the part that was taken from the *adâm* into a woman and brought her to the *adâm*."²

Up until this point, the *adâm* has been genderless. The *adâm* doesn't get a gender until it is split in two. Only at that point, does half of the *adâm* become *ish* while the other half becomes *isha*. Only at this point is it appropriate to use gendered pronouns.

In similar ways this story has been used to oppress LGBTQ+ people. I can't tell you how many times I've heard, "God created Adam and Eve, not Adam and Steve." It's a pity they miss how the *adâm* when first created in this story is genderless – or maybe containing both genders, or was gender fluid. It is only when the *adâm* is split into two beings that the *adâm* is able to understand wholeness. It is only when the *ish* sees the *isha* that he can see the reflection of God's intended wholeness for him. It is only when *ish* sees *isha* that he understands love. The lesson here is, I think, that only when we see the humanness of others that we fully grasp our own humanness.

I love that when God first tries to make a companion for the *adâm*, God reaches back into the soil and forms another creature. It worked pretty well to create the first earth creature, so why not try it again for a different sort of creature to be a companion. The imagery is so earthy: God reaching into the mud and forming a human. And then God animates this mud creature by breathing life into its nostrils. God ends up with dirt under the fingernails again and again. I wonder with author Cole Arthus Riley, "If we knelt down and put our ear to the ground, it would whisper up to us, Yes, you are made in the image of God, but God made you of me."³ If we took this story more seriously – which can be hard to do when we're fighting against it being taken literally – but if we took it more seriously, would be better remember that we are all connected? Human to human? Human to the rest of creation? Would we better remember that we are part of nature?

It would serve us well to remember that the earth does not belong to us; rather, we belong to the earth. All things are connected like the blood that unites us all. Humans did not weave the web of life; we are merely a strand in it. Whatever we do to the web, we do to ourselves.⁴

² From a footnote about verses 20-22 in *The Inclusive Bible*.

³ Quoted by Adam White in his sermon notes, "If I Were Preaching," part of the *Grounded In Creation* worship series resources from Church Anew, footnoted as being from Cole Arthur Riley, *This Here Flesh*, p. 7.

⁴ Adapted from a line of a speech attributed to Chief Seattle, but was almost certainly written by a Hollywood screenwriter. See <http://www.chiefseattle.com/history/chiefseattle/speech/speech.htm> for more.

As important as all this is, I want to back up a few verses. This search for a companion for the earth creature starts because God notices, “It is not good for the earth creature to be alone.”⁵

Throughout the first creation story, God speaks various aspects of creation into being and then declares that it is good. And when God finishes the sixth “day,” a very busy “day,” of creation, God notices that it is *very good*. This verse is the first time God says something is *not* good. What is not good is for the *adâm* to be alone. The storyteller is saying that God created human beings to be in relationship, that connection is central to our wholeness as human beings.

Back in 2023, then U.S. Surgeon General, Dr. Vivek Murthy Released an advisory called “Our Epidemic of Loneliness and Isolation,” outlining the ways that loneliness functions as a national health crisis in the United States. The report found that loneliness is associated with heart disease, dementia, stroke, and anxiety, among other health concerns, reminding us that our flourishing and wellness depends on human connection, belonging, and relationships. It’s as if the Surgeon General discovered a central message of the second creation story.

God created us to be grounded in connection – connection with the rest of creation, connection with each other, connection with God, and connection with our inner selves. And the threats to that connection we were created to have is under greater and greater threat.

Spurred on by the Pope encyclical on Artificial Intelligence, pastor and pilot Cameron Trimble reminds us, “In Genesis, people are made from dust and breath. This image is grounded, connected, vulnerable, and dependent. In the Christian tradition, wisdom has never just meant collecting information. The Desert Fathers chose silence because they knew noise could harm the soul. Thomas Merton warned years ago that modern people risk becoming so distracted by the outside world that they lose touch with their inner life.”⁶

And she notes, “Children today are not just growing up with technology. They are surrounded by systems of behavioral conditioning that are more advanced than anything before. Algorithms figure out what grabs attention, sparks emotions, increases insecurity, and keeps people engaged. AI can now mimic companionship, affirmation, emotional responses, and even intimacy. For young minds, it is getting harder to tell the difference between real relationships and performances....

“Many adults already notice these changes in themselves. Deep reading is harder. Silence often brings anxiety instead of calm. People grab their phones as soon as they feel bored, lonely, unsure, or uncomfortable. Their attention breaks apart. Their thoughts become quick and reactive. Their bodies stay tense almost all the time. Children are growing up in this world before they are mature enough to understand it critically....

⁵ Genesis 2:18, *The Inclusive Bible*.

⁶ Cameron Trimble, “What Makes Us Human? A Reflection on Pope Leo's Encyclical,” *Piloting Faith*, <https://www.pilotingfaith.org/p/what-makes-us-human-a-reflection> (posted 26 May 2026; accessed 19 June 2026).

"I think this is the real worry beneath everything right now: We are developing systems capable of imitating human capacities while simultaneously weakening some of the very qualities that make us most human: sustained attention, contemplation, patience, vulnerability, presence, and the ability to remain fully encounterable to one another."⁷

One of the ways we might be able to regain or guard the ability to remain fully encounterable to one another would be to remember that "we are dirt that weeps, laughs, dances, and contemplates," as the Rev. Dr. Adam White has said. "[We are] the soil from which a strange and beautiful harvest emerges. And, yet, dust we remain. This is a limit, yes. [And] it is also a promise of possibility and worth.

"Receiving our dirtiness as good news tethers us to the goodness of everything God created, earth, water, fire, air, flora and fauna, and points us to a shared fate. Our dusty nature calls us to be grounded in dust and nature. It reminds us that our goodness is derived from our substance." I would add that remembering our dusty nature can help us be grounded in connection.

Amen.

During this worship series, rather than having a minute and a half for quiet contemplation, I invite you to participate in a guided meditation.

You might start by wiggling your body a bit and re-stacking your body in your chair. When you resettle in your chair, notice your breathing. Let your breath slow down and go deeper.

Inhale to the bottom of your lungs and exhale gently. Take a breath. Hold it. And give it back.

As you continue to breathe, you might want to let your eyes gently close.

Notice that the chair is holding you, supporting you. And that the floor is holding your chair. And the building's foundation is holding the floor. And the earth is holding the foundation. You are being held and supported by the earth, our common home.

Notice your breathing again.

In your imagination, see God scooping up some humus of the earth and fashioning it into a creature. And notice that God is breathing into this creature the breath of life ... and setting it on the ground to live.

Notice your breathing again. It is the breath of life, a gift from God.

God's gifts do not end with breath. God gifts us with community so that we do not need to journey alone. God invites us to be grounded in connection.

⁷ Cameron Trimble, "Who Is Forming the Mind? A Reflection on Pope Leo's Encyclical, Part 2," *Piloting Faith*, <https://www.pilotingfaith.org/p/who-is-forming-the-mind-a-reflection> (posted 27 May 2026; accessed 19 June 2026).

As you continue to breathe, receive this blessing:
May friends gather round you like sheltering trees. May voices call your name with kindness. May hands reach out when your burdens are heavy. When you forget you belong, may community remind you of who you are. When you feel scattered, may love draw you back.

When you're ready, gently open your eyes.