

Here is creation explained.

1. In the beginning, God created the Heavens and the Earth and populated the Earth with broccoli, cauliflower and spinach, green and yellow and red vegetables of all kinds, so Man and Woman would live long and healthy lives.
2. Then using God's great gifts, Satan created Ben & Jerry's Ice Cream, and Krispy Crème Donuts. And Satan said, 'You want chocolate with that?' And Man said, "Yes!" and the Woman said, "And as long as you're at it, add some sprinkles." And they gained 10 pounds. And Satan smiled.
3. And God created the healthful yogurt that Woman might keep the figure that Man found so fair. And Satan brought forth white flour from the wheat, and sugar from the cane and combined them. And Woman went from size 6 to size 14.
4. So God said, "Try my fresh green salad." And Satan presented Thousand-Island Dressing, buttery croutons and garlic toast on the side. And Man and Woman searched for bigger fig leaves.
5. God then said, "I have sent you heart healthy vegetables and olive oil in which to cook them." And Satan brought forth deep fried fish and chicken-fried steak so big it needed a platter. And Man gained more weight and his cholesterol went through the roof. God then created a light, fluffy white cake, named it 'Angel Food Cake' and said, "it is good." Satan then created chocolate cake and named it "Devil's Food."
6. God then brought forth running shoes so that His children might lose those extra pounds. And Satan gave cable TV with a remote control so Man would not have to toil changing the channels. And Man and Woman laughed and cried before the flickering blue light and gained pounds.
7. Then God brought forth the potato, naturally low in fat and brimming with nutrition. And Satan peeled off the healthful skin and sliced the starchy center into chips and deep-fried them. And Man gained pounds.
8. God then gave lean beef so that Man might consume fewer calories and still satisfy his appetite. And Satan created McDonald's and WHOPPERS and double bacon cheeseburgers. Then said, "You want fries with that?" and Man replied, "Yes! And super-size them!" And Satan said, "It is good." And Man went into cardiac arrest.
9. God sighed and created the quadruple bypass.
10. Then Satan created cuts to the Health Care System. Amen. (from an e-mail)

The Scriptures give us an unexpected turn in the Sheep and Shepherd metaphors within the Gospel of John. For Jesus is presented not only as the Shepherd of the sheep, the Shepherd who knows and calls His sheep by name, the Shepherd who protects the sheep from all harm; Jesus is also presented in the role of a lamb as well. It's a strange turn of the image. The Shepherd is also the Lamb. And yet this is at the heart of John's pastoral imagery.

Remember, the very first descriptive title given to Jesus in John's Gospel is in chapter 1, and comes from the mouth of John the Baptist, who saw Jesus coming for the first time and exclaimed, "Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world!" (Jn 1:29). In fact, in John's Gospel, more than in any of the other 3 Gospel accounts, the death of Jesus is presented as a substitute for the sacrificial lamb sacrificed by the High Priest on the eve of Passover, that perennial symbol of redemptive sacrifice to free the people from slavery and sin. The details drip with tragic irony as John's Gospel narrates the decision by the High Priest, Caiaphas, to kill Jesus since it was "better for one man to die for the people than the whole nation perish." (Jn 11:50). Of course, he was more prophetic than he knew. And it is John's Gospel that makes it plain that Jesus was crucified on the Day of Preparation for the Passover, and that the horrible event occurred around noon,

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which was the exact hour Caiaphas was sacrificing another lamb across town on the altar before the Temple (Jn 19:14). While the crowds watched the ceremony in the Temple, with the High Priest following ritual liturgy as he inaugurated the beginning of the Passover observance with the sacrifice of an unblemished lamb, John's Gospel makes the subtle but profound point that the real action was happening just outside the gates of the city, across town from the Temple, as the true Lamb of God, Jesus, voluntarily and once-and-for-all laid down His life, "lest the whole of humanity perish."

This is the great mystery of the Gospel presentation of Jesus. He is at once both the all-powerful pre-existent Word who creates the cosmos, and the vulnerable lamb who submits to the knife of the High Priest's cowardly plot without saying a word. He is the Way, the Truth, and the Life, with power over death bringing Lazarus back from the tomb, but humbling Himself to be placed lifeless in another's tomb just weeks later. Jesus is the Good Shepherd, ever vigilant and protective over His flock in the face of any threat, but also the tender Sheep who lays His life down as if He had no power at all.

We are left speechless and awed as we try to wrap our minds around such opposite truths about Jesus. But the centripetal force that seems to hold these 2 truths in orbit is the power of Jesus' love, for love can be powerful and powerless at the same time. It is a powerful love that refrains from controlling when it has the ability to do so, that refuses to be defensive when it has an iron-clad defense. Sometimes love seems terribly weak, speechless, vulnerable. And yet caring for the other more than for oneself is the very source of love's power.

We've seen the enormous and heart-wrenching love of a parent allowing their child to stumble and suffer in order to grow. We've watched a family's suffering love as they wave goodbye to their child going off to serve our country in war. And now we watch the Christ, the Lamb of God, who sets aside His powerful Shepherd's staff to take our place and set us free from our sin. Love is a powerful thing. Even when it dons the cloak of powerlessness. Behold the Lamb of God, our Good Shepherd, who takes away the sins of the world! (taken from GRACEWORKS, 21 April 2024, p. 20)

Second, a word about sacrifice. It is an elemental biblical truth: in a world gone wrong, there is no communion without sacrifice. Since the world has been twisted out of shape, it can be straightened only through a painful process of reconfiguration. It is practically impossible to read any 2 pages of the Bible in succession without coming across the language of God's anger, but we must not interpret this symbolic expression literally, as though God passes in and out of emotional snits like we do. The divine wrath is a theological symbol for the justice of God, which is to say, God's passion to set things right. In His love, God cannot allow His fallen world to remain in alienation; rather He does the hard work of drawing it back into communion. Which means that God is continually about the business of sacrifice, and the first sacrifice is made by God-in-Christ-on-the-cross. (Adapted from Robert Barron, EUCHARIST, p. 62)

A French theologian wrote "To sacrifice oneself is not to deprive oneself of life, but to offer oneself to a higher life. It is the resistance to passing into God that must die." (PREPARE THE WORD.COM, June 18, 2006, p. 1c)

Third, a story to illustrate. In Steven Spielberg's Oscar-winning film, SAVING PRIVATE RYAN, Captain John Miller and a small band of American soldiers are sent into the chaos of the D-Day battlefield to rescue a single infantryman whose brothers had all been killed in battle. You might remember the scene when Captain Miller, played by Tom Hanks, mortally wounded from a fierce battle, utters his final words to the young private Ryan. Drawing Ryan close, Captain Miller whispers the words, "Earn this." And for the rest of his life,

Private Ryan wonders if his life has mattered enough to merit the heroic sacrifice of his comrades who gave up their lives to save his. “Earn this.”

Which is really the question that should haunt all of us for life as Christ’s disciples. How do we earn the life we have been given – and the promise of eternal life we have been given – when it cost nothing less than the death of Christ on the cross?

Earn this. There is our mission. Earn this. Amen. (story as told in GRACE WORKS, June 15, 2008, author not specified.)

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