

Genesis 1 (read by worship leader) (Newton)

1 In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. 2 Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters. 3 And God said, “Let there be light,” and there was light. 4 God saw that the light was good, and he separated the light from the darkness. 5 God called the light “day,” and the darkness he called “night.” And there was evening, and there was morning—the first day. 6 And God said, “Let there be a vault between the waters to separate water from water.” 7 So God made the vault and separated the water under the vault from the water above it. And it was so. 8 God called the vault “sky.” And there was evening, and there was morning—the second day.

*9 And God said, “Let the water under the sky be gathered to one place, and **let dry ground appear.**” And it was so. 10 God called the dry ground “land,” and the gathered waters he called “seas.” And God saw that it was good.*

11 Then God said,

Whoa! Let's stop here a minute. A lot has already happened and I think we need to have another look – a longer look at what just happened. I'm especially intrigued by “dry ground.” When reading the Psalms a year ago I felt called to spend more time outdoors to listen to God's Creation and since then I've travel more than 10,000 miles over this “dry ground” and learned there is a lot to consider.

Now, because we spend too little time in shouting our praises to God, we're going to do that today. So put aside your mother's Mennonite teaching to be quiet in church because this will not be a sermon you can sleep through. I'm going to ask YOU to respond whenever you hear the declaration, **“God caused the dry ground to appear.”** Your response will be “Glory to God!” Let's practice: **God caused the dry ground to appear.**

Congregation response: “Glory to God!”

And just look at this dry ground! In comes in colors – lots and lots of colors. Some ground is brown, some tan, or yellow. If we look beyond soil to the rocks, we find more colors: black, or white, or red, or green, or blue, or purple, or even striped and spotted and so on and so on.

And Genesis simply says, **“God caused the dry ground to appear.”**

Congregation response: “Glory to God!”

Now consider the texture of this dry ground. Some is soft soil. Some is gritty sand. There are smooth pebbles and sharp rocks and mica -- a rock that peels off in layers.

And Genesis simply says, **“God caused the dry ground to appear.”**

Congregation response: “Glory to God!”

Consider, too, the many ways this dry ground is formed. There are huge mountains and deep canyons. There are hills and caves. And some of this dry ground was even formed into the first human!

And Genesis simply says, **“God caused the dry ground to appear.”**

Congregation response: “Glory to God!”

What is this dry ground made of? Some is nutrient rich soil, some are shiny gems, some is gooey clay, and some contains veins of ore.

And Genesis simply says, **“God caused the dry ground to appear.”**

Congregation response: “Glory to God!”

Actually God still making dry ground. Twenty years ago Ronnie and I watched God create new

ground as a volcano spewed lava into ocean.

God even made rocks to praise him. When Jesus rode the colt into Jerusalem on the day we call “Palm Sunday” the Pharisees complained about the noisy crowd praising God. Jesus told them, “if they keep quiet, the stones will cry out.”¹

And Genesis simply says, “**God caused the dry ground to appear.**”

Congregation response: “Glory to God!”

Have you ever thought of all the ways we can use this dry ground. Look around you! We use things made from rocks and minerals every day. Metal is used in everything from paperclips to the cars that brought us here. Silicone is only one of 66 minerals used to make a computer!² We use stone for building walls and roads and houses and cathedrals for worship. It is estimated that every person in the United States will use more than three million pounds of rocks, minerals and metals during their lifetime.³ That’s 15-hundred TONS! – each of us!

God caused the dry ground to appear.

Congregation response: “Glory to God!”

And this “dry ground” is amazing!

Gypsum is the basis for drywall. It contains water in its mineral structure, which it loses when heated and makes it a fire-retardant building material.

Ceramics, from ancient pottery to today’s simple flower pots to gorgeous porcelain are made from **clay**.

In the time before dry-erase boards, schools relied upon chalkboards made from **slate**. Even the **chalk** for writing on the board is a limestone. The **graphite** in pencils is also some of this “dry ground.” Powdered graphite is also used for lubrication.

Granite and marble counter tops and statues are made from stone. Glass is formed by melting **quartz** found in **sand**. When it's melted it becomes clear and it loses its mineral strength so can be formed into sheets or glassware while it's molten.

Sulfur is an integral part of gunpowder, fireworks and matches to start a fire. Fires can also be started with **flints** and **steel**.

Garnet is a gemstone harder than sand, so small grains are used as an abrasive for both sand blasting and in sand paper. In contrast, **talc** is such a soft mineral it is used in baby powder.

Obsidian is a natural glass that forms when lava cools very quickly. It can be broken to produce extremely sharp edges which many cultures used for knives. Even today, some surgical scalpels are made from obsidian.

Pumice is also formed by rapid cooling of lava and is used as an abrasive. Remember Lava brand soap which includes pumice as a scouring agent for cleaning extra-dirty hands?

Copper is used in the manufacture of electrical wire, copper pipes for water, copper cookware, and in computers.

And we eat some of this “dry ground.”

Salt is an essential nutrient which is mined from the “dry ground.” It not only flavors our food, but also preserves it, and melts ice.

¹ Luke 18:40

² [Minerals used in a computer \(mine-engineer.com\)](http://mine-engineer.com)

³ [Rocks and Minerals: Everyday Uses | Museum of Natural and Cultural History \(uoregon.edu\)](http://Museum of Natural and Cultural History (uoregon.edu)) 900 pounds of lead, 700 pounds of zinc, 1300 pounds of copper, 3600 pounds of bauxite (aluminum), 30000 pounds of ore, 28000 pounds of salt, 1,500,000 pounds of stone, sand, and gravel, 6500 pounds of cement, 82000 gallons of petroleum. Images © UO Museum of Natural and Cultural History generously supported by The Ford Family Foundation.

The essential mineral **Zinc** has been reported as beneficial in shortening the duration of common colds, so it is included in some over the counter cold remedies. Zinc is also used for galvanizing to prevent rust.

Another essential mineral is **Iron**. Not only do our bodies need it, this same mineral iron is used to make frying pans and steel.

Silver and **gold** are better electrical conductors than copper, which is why they're used in high-end electronic devices like cell phones and some audio equipment. They're more rare than copper and so are more valuable. That's why we assign gold and silver and gem stones value so we can use them in trade more often than we used them for their electrical properties.

Mercury is a liquid metal at room temperature which is why it has been used for so long in thermometers.

Lead is a very soft metal which has been used for bullets since the origin of firearms. Lead is also used for fishing weights and in automobile batteries. Lead is a radiation shield like the apron you're covered with in the dentist's office and is also used in shields at nuclear reactors.

The concrete that makes up most of the urban landscape is a mix of **sand** and **gravel**, with cement made from **limestone**.

And Genesis simply says, “**God caused the dry ground to appear.**”

Congregation response: “Glory to God!”

After the Flood of Noah's day, God did it again. Genesis 8:13 says, the water had dried up from the earth. Noah then removed the covering from the ark and saw that the surface of **the ground was dry.**” When this happened, new kinds of rocks were found.

Bones of animals crushed under the flood waters turned to stone we call “fossils.” Some of this new “dry ground” would burn.

Oil was formed in shale rocks. Not only can we burn oil for heat, we refine it into gasoline to power our cars. You mechanics know how important oil is as a lubricant.

Coal is the remains of woody plants compressed into a solid mass and is still burned to create electrical energy.

The information of an entire PhD in Geology and Mineralogy are summed up in these simple words from Genesis, “**God caused the dry ground to appear.**”

Congregation response: “Glory to God!”

God could have made one kind of plain dry ground, but ponder for a while the ingenious variety of just this one aspect of his Creation! Jesus encouraged us to look at Creation to learn about the Creator.

“Look at the birds; look at the lilies,” he exclaimed in what we call the “Sermon on the Mount.” And we can learn a lot by looking at the dry ground, too! When we examine our world closely, there is so much which should cause us to praise its Creator.

“**God caused the dry ground to appear.**”

Congregation response: “Glory to God!”

Creation of this “dry ground” gives us a way to conceptualize the Creator. A steady and strong “rock” is also used to describe God's protection as in our Call to Worship this morning taken from Psalm 62. The image of such an unshakable rock describes a Savior worthy of trust.

Psalm 118:22-23 says: “The stone the builders rejected has become the **cornerstone**; the LORD has done this, and it is marvelous in our eyes.” In ancient architecture, the cornerstone was the first stone set during the building process. Careful measurements were taken to ensure the cornerstone was

square to ensure the proper alignment of the remainder of the building.⁴

The Gospel writers Matthew, Mark, and Luke would have had this in mind when they quoted Psalm 118 to describe Jesus as the marvelous and worthy Cornerstone of our faith. This corner stone will set our faith straight and true. We can follow Jesus to align ourselves to the will of God.

The Apostle Peter quotes Psalm 118 along with Isaiah’s description that the cornerstone is a precious stone. The Apostle Paul told the Ephesians, “Consequently, you are ... members of [God’s] household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord.”⁵

Not only is the “dry ground” of Genesis useful to us in so many physical ways, it also provides an appropriate way to describe the firmness and surety of God as we are built together into his temple – a place of worship.

And Genesis simply says, “**God caused the dry ground to appear.**”

Congregation response: “Glory to God!”

Wow! This brief account of creation is starting to sound like an **understatement** – and it is! If the creation of this world has been understated, what else has been understated in scripture? Perhaps everything. After all who can describe the fullness and the presence of God? The Apostle Paul suggests that any description of the new earth is understated. He records in 1 Corinthians 2:9-10:

⁹ As it is written: “What no eye has seen, what no ear has heard, and what no human mind has conceived”— the things God has prepared for those who love him— ¹⁰ these are the things God has revealed to us by his Spirit.

The Apostle John had glimpses into God’s heaven and his plans for the new earth. Here’s his description found in Revelation 21:

21 Then I saw “a new heaven and a new earth,” for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea.

So once again, chaos will disappear and out of the sea God will **cause the dry ground to appear.**

Congregation response: “Glory to God!”

Let’s continue reading Revelation 21: ² I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. ³ And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Look! **God’s dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them.** They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. ⁴ ‘He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death’ or mourning or crying or pain, for the **old order of things has passed away.**” ⁵ He who was seated on the throne said, “**I am making everything new!**” Then he said, “Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.”

But not everyone will see this. Some will see burning sulfur instead. ⁸ But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars—they will be consigned to the fiery lake of burning **sulfur**. This is the second death.” And I’m pretty sure this description is an understatement, too! Thank God for the forgiveness the believer has in Jesus!

Skipping down to verse 18: “The wall [of the New Jerusalem] was made of **jasper**, and the city of pure **gold**, as pure as **glass**. ¹⁹ The foundations of the city walls were decorated with every kind of

⁴ [The Little-Known Purpose of the Cornerstone | Blog | Bill Whittaker \(billwarch.com\)](#)

⁵ Matthew 21:42; Mark 12:10-11; Luke 20:17; Acts 4:11; 1 Peter 2:6-8; Isaiah 28: 16; Ephesians 2:19-21.

precious **stone**. The first foundation was **jasper**, the second **sapphire**, the third **agate**, the fourth **emerald**,²⁰ the fifth **onyx**, the sixth **ruby**, the seventh **chrysolite**, the eighth **beryl**, the ninth **topaz**, the tenth **turquoise**, the eleventh **jacinth**, and the twelfth **amethyst**.²¹ The twelve gates were twelve pearls, each gate made of a single pearl. The great street of the city was of gold, as pure as transparent glass.

The walls and gates and streets of this new city will positively glisten. They will shine.

Yet who can describe what cannot be imagined. Heaven is so indescribable, that any words or images of heaven are a drastic understatement! The sparkling gems used in construction of the walls and streets of heaven will be so common they will no longer derive value for their rarity like they do on this earth. Indeed, the valuable aspect of the New Jerusalem is not any gem stone, but "the Cornerstone" we met earlier. Let's continue reading in verse 22:

²² I did not see a temple in the city, because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. ²³ The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp. ²⁴ The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their splendor into it. ²⁵ On no day will its gates ever be shut, for there will be no night there. ²⁶ The glory and honor of the nations will be brought into it. ²⁷ Nothing impure will ever enter it, nor will anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life.

Sometimes I don't think we spend enough time basking in the beauty of God's creation and what it reveals about our Almighty God. We could learn so much if we did!

And I'm pretty sure we don't spend enough time contemplating the New Creation that God promises for His Redeemed people – for the people whose names are written in the Lamb's Book of Life. If we would deeply consider what we learn from this little glimpse into the New Creation that awaits us, we would realize this description is such a great understatement. Who can describe what we cannot imagine or understand?

Even so, we are invited to ponder heaven. And in pondering we are given hope and peace. This should make us all the more eager to see and experience God's New Creation.

And the wonderful news is that Jesus invites us to begin the experience now! We come to him asking forgiveness and guidance – maybe for the second time or one-hundredth time. We continue to seek the direction he would have us go and to know the things he would have us do. We hold his hand as he leads us through life and right in through the pearly gates whether through death or when he returns to gather his church out of this messy, dying world.

When the Lamb's Book of Life is opened to look for my name, I don't want it to be covered in dust. I want my name to be one that has a history of being active. How about your name? or the names of your loved ones? Are their names written in that book? What about the names of your neighbors or others you meet? Is this book important enough that you'll want to tell others about it?

When God calls forth that new "dry ground" I plan to be there to walk all over it. How about you?

If so, say, "*Glory to God!*"

Amen.

By Diane Mason