



*"Made in  
God's Image"  
Genesis 1: 2-3  
May 18, 2008  
Rev. Shelley Lavenne*

My name is Sarah. Not the Sarah that you know of Abraham and Sarah fame. Like you, I am one of their descendents. But I lived about 500-600 years before the birth of Jesus. Like you, I believe in a wonderful, compassionate, strong God.

It's the year 570 Before Common Era (before Christ was born) and for the past 14 years, my family and a good portion of the leaders of the people of Israel are in Exile in Babylon. We used to live in a small town just outside of Jerusalem. We're middle class – just enough of a herd of livestock to get by and decently educated. My husband was one of the leading local government officials.

But the Babylonians invaded our beautiful country and we were defeated. And also devastated. Now these Babylonians were smart. They could have sent more armies and more armies into our land to make sure there were no revolts. But that would have taken a lot of money, people and effort and they wanted to go on and defeat other nations.

So they found another way to subdue us, to make us feel small and unimportant. They hauled off all of the leaders and the educated people of Israel and took us to live in exile in Babylon. They immersed us into their own society, that was so different from our own. They put us off kilter, into chaos. Change can do that, if you're not careful.

And, let me tell you that Babylonian culture was very enticing. For so many years we had been defending ourselves from invaders. We were not a very wealthy country. Many of us were making do. But in Babylon, the wealth of a mighty nation was so apparent. Beautiful horses to ride instead of walking. In the streets, I stopped and stared at the beautiful dresses and jewels that the Babylonian women wore. Big houses. Many servants.

My husband was an educated man and it was easy for him to find work. We were able to bring our herd of animals – our wealth with us. My children were small children when we arrived but 14 years later, they are now all adults or close to it.

My sons- my husband ensured – knew how to read and write – so it is easy for them to find employment, climbing quickly in the ranks of government and high-powered companies. They work long hours, desiring more money like the Babylonians. They tell me our God is weak and unimportant – why else are we a defeated people? The Babylonian masters tell them that they are the God to worship. And certainly it seems that's who they worship – for they work all the time, ignoring the Sabbath. Their children rarely see them, neither does I as their mother. No time. No time, they say. We're just so busy.

My older brother – he could never adjust to Babylon. He had a bit of a lisp and that made it difficult for him to communicate. He didn't get the good paying jobs. He is in despair. Anytime he has a coin, he puts it towards wine as if he wants to be as far away from

reality as possible. I find it hard to see him now – this disheveled, stooped over man. I remember my big brother from when I was a child – he would laugh, tickle me and put me on his shoulders. Then he knew he was strong because of God and he stood tall. My brother has forgotten that God is still with him.

My friend's husband died recently. In Babylon, without a husband she has nothing – only poverty. A community of us who seek to follow our loving God are helping her out. This is God's law. We look after each other – particularly when people can't help themselves. We love others as God loves us. Some people who have fallen away from the faith are curious about our behaviour – that we would help another in need. But others including one of my sons speak the Babylonian way: "This widow is nothing, worth nothing, better to be left to die. Besides, I have enough to contend with in my own life; to busy to be worrying about a poor widow. She is nothing."

Well I know that to our God – my poor widow friend is quite something. She comes from God's goodness. But by Babylonian standards she is nothing.

In Babylon – it is the Babylonian Masters who are the all powerful, who we are told are the gods. It is wealth. It is money. It is having the best vehicle or house or most beautiful clothes.

But was it the Babylonians who made this great earth and all the beauty that is in our world?

No. It was the wonderful, gracious loving God of goodness. I know who is most powerful and it isn't a bunch of men and women in fancy clothes.

Like many of you this weekend, I spend time tending to my garden. One day as I saw new buds opening, the words of this poem came to me.

"In the beginning, God created the heavens and earth – all tht you see. Out of nothing, God created it. Before, it was all blackness, chaos. God brought order. God said, 'let there be light' and there was.' And there was Day and there was evening. And God rested.

God spoke – Let there be sky. And so God made the great blue sky above, separating water below from that which is above. God called the sky the heavens. It was evening, it was morning. Day two.

On the third day, God spoke again. And that which was chaotic found harmony. All the particles of dirt came together to form land. God named the land earth and the pooled water, ocean and sea. God looked all around at what was created and said..."It is good"

Then God commanded the earth to grow all manner of green things – fruit-bearing trees and seed-bearing plants. God looked all around and said, "It is Good."

On day four, God created the seasons and the days and years. He made the sun and the moon and the stars. God saw that it was good. It was evening. It was morning.

On the fifth day. God spoke, telling the waters to make fish and all sea life. Birds came to fly across the sky.

On the sixth day, God spoke to the earth to generate life. And every sort of animal came to be – cattle, reptiles, wild animals and bugs. And God saw that it was good.

Then God said, Let us make human beings in our image, make them reflecting our nature. So they can take care of the animals and this earth I have created it. So God created human beings, he created them god-like, reflecting God's nature, male and female, God created them. God blessed them saying "Prosper, reproduce , fill the Earth, take charge.

God looked over everything he had made;  
it was so good, so very good!  
Heaven and Earth were finished, down to the last detail.

By the seventh day  
God had finished his work.  
On the seventh day  
he rested from all his work.  
God blessed the seventh day.  
He made it a Holy Day  
Because on that day he rested from his work,  
all the creating God had done.

This is the story of how it all started,  
of Heaven and Earth when they were created.

I wrote this poem in my head. In my day women weren't taught to read and write, only a handful of men were. Then I told the poem to my husband. Over the next few days we talked about how our people needed to be reminded they were created in God's image – that they are filled with the goodness of God and cherished by God. We knew that living in this greedy, busy foreign land was tearing at our people deep in their souls and spirits.

My husband and I passed the words of this poem to our grandchildren and they onto their children. And it was our grandchildren, great grandchildren and their peers who did return to Jerusalem to rebuild our faith and our people who believe in One God. That's 35 years from now – when the fortunes of the Babylonians failed. Be wary of people who make themselves out to be gods, who rely only on themselves. It is only God who is most enduring and most powerful.

I know the poem I told is probably quite different from the one that's in your Bible. My grandchildren added to it and their children and others since then. I don't mind. Because they kept what was most important to the text as most important. We are made by God in God's image. It is God who is most powerful.

And as my descendents, I hope you will remember this. You are loved by God right down to the core of you. It doesn't matter what you've done or who you are. You are God's beloved. And God has given you this beautiful world to relish, enjoy and take care of.

May it be so. Amen.

Notes:

1. This sermon was inspired by a 1982 sermon by Jerry Eckert who re-told the story of God creating the world, likely adding in metaphors from the context of 24 years ago.

(He chose to tell a story that Sunday because his wife said his stories were much better than him telling her and the congregation what to do). I decided to create the storyteller, Sarah, from the time of the Babylonian exile when many Biblical scholars suggest this part of Scripture was likely written.

2. 'Sarah's poem' is actually adapted from and in many parts taken directly from Eugene Peterson's *The Message*.
3. Costume Advisors for Sarah: Elinor Melnyk, Marijane Rose and Marny Campkin