

Session 3

And God Saw That It Was Good (Genesis 1)

Focus

To see issues of hunger and scarcity, health and illness, in the context of God's intended abundance and well-being.



Preparation

- Issue invitations and announcements as needed. Is there anyone whose presence could make a substantial difference within the group or parish who should be encouraged to come?
- Refer to “For each session you will need” on page 4. Refer back to the “Preparation” in Sessions 1 and 2.
- Review the notes you made after the last session about the group dynamics. How might a different room arrangement encourage conversation among the participants? What additions to the space would make it more inviting?
- Bring seven (7) candles to light during the reading of “God’s Story” below.
- When preparing to lead this session, notice that the opening parts have a little different “tone” – emphasis on “and it was good” – than the previous two sessions. What change might you make in the space to invoke this positive tone?
- Read the definition of globalization on “Our Story” of the handout “And God Saw...” and check some of the links for further information.

Welcome

As you welcome the participants, provide a quick recap of what has happened so far. Then, remind the group of the prayerful context of this work, and invite them to be seated and center themselves in God.

Opening Prayer

The leader (or a previously designated participant) begins:

(L) Blessed be the reign of the one, holy and living God, now and always. **(All)** Amen.

Ask the participants to greet one other person by name and name one gift from God's goodness and blessings that you wish for that person.

(L) We have greeted each other and shared from the richness of God's goodness and blessings. Now, together, let us pray:

O God, your name is providence. O God, your name is love. You have spoken us into life, formed us in goodness and summon us to fullness. Continue to shape us in the knowledge that your gifts are abundant, your desire for us is infinite, and your spirit within us can do all that we are called to do and become for the people and creation you cherish as your own. We ask this in the name of your own Christ, who lives and reigns united with you in the love of your Holy Spirit, now and always. **(All)** Amen.



God's Story

Make sure that everyone has access to a Bible, and distribute the handout, “And God Saw That It Was Good.”

Then, **comment on** Genesis 1:1-31 (as adapted):

When we open the Scriptures, what we learn first is that in the beginning was God. This is our beginning, and creation's. Walter Brueggemann, a well-known scholar of the Old (First) Testament has said that the “beginning point for God...is the wonder and goodness of creation,” and that creation itself is an “exuberant, lyrical, doxological expression of gratitude and amazement for the goodness and generosity of God. The theme that recurs is generosity and abundance. There is enough! There is more than enough!”¹

Everything is given. Everything is ordered. Everything is delight. There are no strong and weak, rich or poor, no struggle, no competition for life and its fullness. This is the way it was in the beginning, for a God who created us in the divine image. Let us listen now to what the Spirit is saying to a people who are blessed from the beginning.

Read (or have a previously designated person read) the abridged version of Genesis 1 in the handout, remembering that it is intended to be poetry. If you are using candles, have someone light one each time the reader says “it was good.”

Ask the group to reflect silently for a few moments. **Gently guide** the silent reflection with questions like these, leaving some “breathing space” in between each of them:

- What must it have been like to be God as creation unfolded?
- When in your own life did you recognize something as “very good” in a deep sense? What did that feel like?
- What does it feel like to be wanting; to be lacking; to feel insecure; to have a child, or parent or spouse in trouble and be unable to do anything about it?
- What must it feel like when God looks at a good creation, where there is “more than enough,” and sees powerlessness, want, hunger, scarcity?

After time to reflect, invite anyone who would like to share a thought to do so. Note the feelings and reactions. Move quietly into the next portion of the session.

Personal Stories

Have different readers prepared to read the stories of “Baby Antonio and Maria” and “Ibu Sahnun” from the handout.

Divide the group, if large, into several smaller groups, or work as a whole if the size is manageable. Discuss the stories with the following questions:

- What do these two stories have to do with the Scripture we just heard?
- How are the experiences of Baby Antonio and Maria, and Ibu Sahnun similar? Different? Separated by oceans and continents, what connects them, if anything?



¹ Walter Brueggemann, “The Truth of Abundance: Relearning Dayenu,” in Brueggemann, *The Covenanted Self*, Patrick Miller, ed., Minneapolis, Fortress Press, 1999, p. 108.



- If you were one of the people telling their stories in these excerpts, how would you understand the Genesis text?
- If there really is “more than enough for all” (and scientists, social scientists, economists and theologians all seem to agree on this), why are the people in these stories lacking? What is the cause? And what do you think we can do about it?

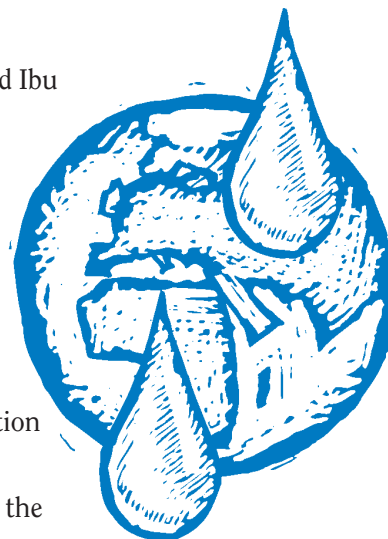
Make sure that there is a **recorder** in each group and bring them back together to share as a whole.

The Globalization Story

Before turning to the “Globalization Story” in the handout, **ask the group** to define “globalization.” Ask if anyone has a direct, personal experience of “globalization.”

Then **turn to the handout**. Ask participants to read the globalization facts out loud, with a different volunteer reading each point. On newsprint, write down one word that summarizes each point. Then ask the group to discuss the following questions (Remember, there are no wrong answers.):

- What connects these facts?
- What do they have to do with the stories of Baby Antonio, Maria and Ibu Sahnun?
- What do these stories have to do with globalization?
- How are these stories related to the truth of abundance disclosed in the Genesis story and in today’s world?
- Why does it seem as though, generally, women and children are the ones most often affected by poverty? Why do population rates decline when poverty is reduced among women?
- How do the Millennium Development Goals suggest that globalization may provide some solutions to the world’s problems?
- In what ways do corporations contribute positively or negatively to the process of globalization?



Now, **summarize and record** the insights of the group. **Read** the definition of globalization found in “Our Story.” **Ask** the group to discuss it, in the light of the stories, previous discussion and the Scripture.

Our Story

Remind the group about the need for changed hearts that lead to changed responses. Remember that when God spoke words, they became light, water, living things, and even flesh! Go over the suggested actions from “Our Story” in the handout. Does the group feel that these are an adequate response from them at this time? Are there other suggestions for activities?

Ask whether, in addition to things that might be done individually, the group is ready to **undertake one activity** for one week together? The activity itself can be done separately, but will be the same activity that others are doing. What will it be?

Tell the group that you will ask that their action and faithfulness be included in the intercessory prayers at Sunday worship. Ask if there is anything that the group wants to ask the congregation as a whole to think and pray about.

Reflection and Closing Prayer

Ask the group to be seated, quiet and centered in God for the closing reflection and prayer.

(L) Remember our beginning and our end is in the abundance of God's love. Be still, now. Our life together, and this moment together in God is a taste of that abundance. (Pause for a moment). Let us pray:

O God, lover of all you have made, walk with us this week and lead us more deeply into your mystery. Let us touch others and make tangible in their life in some small way, the gift of knowing that there is enough, more than enough, because all that is, is from you and in you.

Then, three times, with the whole group joining on the second and third repetition.

And give us – all of us – this day our daily bread. Amen.



After the Session

Before everyone leaves, invite anyone who would like to share suggestions or ideas that they have thought of in response to your suggestion at the beginning of the session. Let them know “I will be here for the next 10 minutes to hear any ideas or suggestions, or to collect any notes you might want to quickly jot down!”

Remember to list anything that needs to be communicated to the larger parish or staff, including the intercessory prayer. Review the suggestions under prior “after the session” headings. And remember to take a moment to pause, and thank God for being with you in leading and serving this group, and for being “enough.”

