

The New Creation, Part 1: Laying the Groundwork

A Sermon by Rev. Joel Christian Glenn

20 September 2026

Children's Talk: Creation

Who made the world? The Lord did! That is the very first thing that the Word tells us:

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form, and void; and darkness *was* on the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters. (Genesis 1:1-2)

What then are some of the things that the Lord has made? Anything that exists was made by the Lord. And when did the Lord make it all? In the beginning is what the story says. It then explains how over the course of six days God made light, the seas and skies, dry land and plants, birds and fish, animals and people, and at last could rest on the seventh day.

But God never actually stopped creating. He keeps creating things, even now. When the day ends it is night; then the Lord makes a new day. When it has been winter, the Lord then makes it spring. Things that were dry and dead start to come back to life. Plants put out little buds and fresh leaves and flowers. The Lord also makes new animals all the time: animals give birth and now there is more of that animal in the world. The Lord never stops creating things.

That's also true of us. The Lord made you many years ago. He made me about 37 years ago! But the Lord also keeps making us into new and better people too. I used to be a baby, but then the Lord made me into a toddler, a child, a teenager, an adult. And He is also working to make me into an angel, a person who is loving and kind, who is thoughtful and does the right things. The Lord keeps recreating us like this all the time. This is excellent news because it means we will always be getting better.

This is related to something we are going to do just now: we are going to have a baptism. A baptism is a way for a person to say to the Lord that they want Him to

keep making them better. The people who are getting baptised make a promise to the Lord that they will try to follow Him, that they will learn about Him from His Word, and that they will try their best to stop doing bad things and keep doing good things. That doesn't happen all at once; but over and over and over again, the Lord will be recreating them into new and better people. And He can do the same for all of us.

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The Word begins with the story of Creation, taking place over a matter of days:

In six days Jehovah made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day. (Exodus 20:11)

This flies in the face of everything that we can observe scientifically about the age and development of the universe. That does not, however, mean that this story isn't true in its own way. The Teachings of the New Church say that we should not take it as the literal description of the creation of the universe, but that instead, it is a spiritual metaphor for the Lord's creation of us, or rather His recreation of us, as He forms and shapes us into angels. This is the creation that the Word speaks to and that the Lord cares about:

Everyone who is called by My name,
I have created him for My glory;
I have formed him, yes, I have made him. (Isaiah 43:7)

Today and again in two weeks time we will reflect on the Days of Creation from this point of view. There are two ways to think of this process: first, as one that begins as our spiritual awareness opens, and then continues for the rest of our lives, and indeed to eternity; but second, as a cycle that is repeated on smaller scales in every stage of life, as we become aware, grow, overcome, and find true spiritual victory and rest in the Lord. Our focus today will be on the first four stages; try to notice how for almost all of them the focus is not on fixing anything or becoming perfect overnight. In fact, almost all of the focus is on becoming aware, honestly acknowledging what is really there, both good and bad, and then taking things step by step, a little at a time.

0. In the Beginning

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form, and void; and darkness was on the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters. (Genesis 1:1-2)

The story begins not with day one, but with day zero as it were: a description of what came before creation, namely formless emptiness, a dark void, with nothing really there but the Spirit of God. These qualities describe how we are prior to making any spiritual progress. The Teachings of the New Church give this explanation:

The “faces of the deep” are the cravings of the unregenerate man, and the falsities from them, of which he wholly consists, and in which he is totally immersed. In this state, having no light, he is like a “deep” or something obscure and confused. (*Secrets of Heaven* §18)

That’s a pretty depressing picture of humanity. But it is also something that we all have to come to grips with. We start out life fully self-centred, in a literal sense: a baby is self-centred, not because it is bad, but because that is all it knows to be. Over the years we learn to love and care for others and think of them first. But an inclination remains to simply pursue what feels good and to believe the ideas that justify that pursuit. This is human nature, and the point from which we all begin our spiritual lives.

But even so, there is something of the Lord present with us as well. It is the Spirit of God, hovering over the face of the waters. That word “hovering” is also used to mean brooding, what a hen does over her eggs. It speaks of the incredibly powerful and yet hidden presence of the Lord that is with us even before we are aware of Him, even before we know He exists (*Secrets of Heaven* §19). At our worst, when we hit rock bottom spiritually, when we are incredibly selfish or immersed in our own desires, the Lord is present, already preparing the things that can lead us to become better selves.

Reflection:

- *Can you think of a time when you have felt that God was totally absent?*
- *How has it felt to do something that seems completely unfixable or unforgiveable?*

The earth was without form, and void; and darkness was on the face of the deep.

1. Day 1: Light and Darkness

Then God said, "Let there be light"; and there was light. And God saw the light, that it was good; and God divided the light from the darkness. God called the light Day, and the darkness He called Night. So the evening and the morning were the first day. (Genesis 1:3-5)

The very first thing that is made is light. Suddenly there is something to see by, and although darkness remains (now called night, in contrast to day), there isn't just indistinguishable darkness. We sometimes think that the first step of spiritual growth is to remove something evil or to do something good, to fix the problem or begin a new effort. But the reality is that the very first thing that must come before anything else is simply to be able to look and to see; to observe what is already there. If we think of repentance, the core spiritual practice by which the Lord transforms us, the very first step is to examine ourselves.

Now that does not mean this is an easy thing to do! Honest self-examination is incredibly challenging. Part of the problem is that we are woefully ignorant of how warped some of our ideas are and we are even wilfully blind to some of our faults. The Lord can help us see through this blindness though, and give us new insights into ourselves:

When man is conceived anew, he then begins for the first time to know that his goods are not goods, and also, as he comes more into the light, that the Lord exists, and that He is good and truth itself. (*Secrets of Heaven* §20).

The first step in spiritual growth or recreation is to be willing to see where we may be going wrong, and start looking to the Lord as the source of what is truly good. Self-examination is often challenging because we are either scared of what we will find and overwhelmed by shame or guilt; or else jump so quickly to doing better that we

don't even pause long enough to really see or understand the problem. We need to be able to look at ourselves in the light, without immediately recoiling or rushing on.

Reflection:

- *Where in your life could you use deeper reflection?*
- *What might be getting in the way of doing that reflection?*

Then God said, "Let there be light"; and there was light.

2. Day 2: The Division of the Waters

Then God said, "Let there be an expanse in the midst of the waters, and let it divide the waters from the waters." Thus God made the expanse, and divided the waters which were under the expanse from the waters which were above the expanse; and it was so. And God called the expanse Heaven. So the evening and the morning were the second day. (Genesis 1:6-8)

On the second day there is a division into things that are lower and higher, the waters beneath the expanse and waters above the expanse. You may remember this was the subject a few weeks ago in the sermon on keeping a distinction between things that are worldly and those that are spiritual. The Teachings of the New Church also explain this step as a recognition that within us there is an external self and an internal self (*Secrets of Heaven* §24). The external self is driven by desire and worldly concerns, while the internal self is motivated by love for the Lord and genuine care for others.

Notice that once again the spiritual meaning is not about taking action or fixing a problem: it is about noticing, analysing, and categorizing. This is when we start to observe our own conflicting desires, some that lead to evil and others to good, some ideas that are warped or twisted and other ideas that really will give us a foundation for living a good life. It also represents a realization or belief that we do have a higher mind that can make better choices. Not that we have started making those better choices *per se*. But if we think that we are slaves to our lower selves and that's all there is, we won't be able to take responsibility for mistakes and consciously strive to

do better in the future. We have to somehow hold on to the idea that the Lord has already granted us some ability to be different than who we currently are.

Reflection:

- *Can you think of any of your choices or behaviours that might be motivated by selfish or worldly concerns?*
- *Can you think of any of your choices or behaviours that seem to genuinely be motivated by love and care for others?*

God divided the waters which were under the expanse from the waters which were above the expanse.

3. Day 3: Land and Plants

Then God said, "Let the waters under the heavens be gathered together into one place, and let the dry land appear"; and it was so. And God called the dry land Earth, and the gathering together of the waters He called Seas. And God saw that it was good.

Then God said, "Let the earth bring forth grass, the herb that yields seed, and the fruit tree that yields fruit according to its kind, whose seed is in itself, on the earth"; and it was so. And the earth brought forth grass, the herb that yields seed according to its kind, and the tree that yields fruit, whose seed is in itself according to its kind. And God saw that it was good. So the evening and the morning were the third day. (Genesis 1:9-13)

This is the day on which solid ground appears and living things start to grow for the first time. It represents the consolidation of what has been seen and acknowledged in the previous steps, and building on that by consciously taking action. These first steps are just the beginning; they are baby steps as it were. The motivations are still going to be very mixed; they will be superficial and external; they will be inexpertly applied. It's saying "sorry" because it's expected of you; it's making amends for harm simply to smooth things over; it's doing and saying the right things without feeling it in your heart or out of pride.

These are the tender sprouts poking up out of the ground, the herbs that spread their little seeds, even the fruit-bearing trees. They are all good and useful; but the fact that they are inanimate, and although living not alive in the way that animals and people are, represents the fact early in spiritual growth, most of the good things we do and the true ideas we profess are still centred on self; it is only

with the creation of living creatures that true, sincere, love and faith are represented (*Secrets of Heaven* §9, 29). And yet this is a *good thing*. It is a crucial step in our regeneration.

Reflection:

- *What are the “low hanging fruit” when it comes to doing good things in your life: the simplest, most comfortable changes you could make for the better?*

Then God said, “Let the earth bring forth grass, the herb that yields seed, and the fruit tree that yields fruit according to its kind, whose seed is in itself, on the earth.”

4. To Be Continued...

That takes us through day three of Creation. Notice how these first three stages, four if you include day zero, are not about become a perfectly good person. They start with observing, acknowledging, and trying to do something good and speak the truth. The beginning stages of spiritual regeneration are not about fixing everything in one go, they are about laying the ground work. Now the Lord does want us to advance beyond this stage; but to develop further we have to go steadily step by step, not rushing to the end point, before we have built a solid foundation.

In six days Jehovah made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day. (Exodus 20:11)

The New Creation

The first chapter of Genesis in the internal sense deals, in general,
with the new creation of man, or of his regeneration.
(*Secrets of Heaven* §4)

Everyone who is called by My name,
I have created him for My glory;
I have formed him, yes, I have made him.
(Isaiah 43:7)

In the Beginning...

The earth was without form, and void; and darkness was on the face of the deep.

Reflection:

- Can you think of a time when you have felt that God was totally absent?
- How has it felt to have done something that seems completely unfixable or unforgiveable?

Day 1: Light and Darkness

Then God said, "Let there be light"; and there was light.

Reflection:

- Where in your life could you use deeper reflection?
- What might be getting in the way of doing that reflection?

Day 2: The Waters Divided

God divided the waters which were under the expanse from the waters which were above the expanse.

Reflection:

- Can you think of any of your choices or behaviours that might be motivated by selfish or worldly concerns?
- Can you think of any of your choices or behaviours that seem to genuinely be motivated by love and care for others?

Day 3: Land and Plants

Then God said, "Let the earth bring forth grass, the herb that yields seed, and the fruit tree that yields fruit according to its kind, whose seed is in itself, on the earth."

Reflection:

- What are the "low hanging fruit" when it comes to doing good things in your life: the simplest, most comfortable changes you could make for the better?

Day 4: The Sun, Moon, and Stars

Then God made two great lights: the greater light to rule the day, and the lesser light to rule the night. He made the stars also.

Reflection:

- Can you think of a time when you did or thought something selfless, but then immediately undermined that selflessness with excess pride in yourself?
- Can you think of a time when you felt a love for someone else so great that it must have come from God? Or seen what to do with such clarity that it could not have been you coming up with an answer on your own?

Day 5: Sea Creatures and Birds

Then God said, "Let the waters swarm with swarming things, living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the face of the expanse of the heavens."

Reflection:

- Can you think of a time when you have used the truth to feed your ego or set yourself over other people?
- Can you think of a time when one of your beliefs imposed some uncomfortable/inconvenient obligations on you, but you stuck with it anyway?

Day 6: Animals and People

Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, according to our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the heavens, and over the beast, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth."

Reflection:

- Can you think of one of the harder selfish habits you have, one you have struggled to give up? In what way is selfish or materialistic love holding on to that habit?
- Can you think of a time that you loved someone so much that it was easy to make a sacrifice for them?

Day 7: God Rested

And on the seventh day God ended His work which He had done, and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had done.

Reflection:

- What struggles do you most wish the Lord would give you the power to completely and totally overcome?
- What kind of love do you one day hope to have as the main motivation in your life?