

THE BALLAD OF HUMANKIND
Genesis 2: 4a – 9, 15

I am rapt in thought. It is quite a journey becoming a human; it is dangerous and takes millions of years to develop into what we are now. I find it extremely interesting. A long time ago amidst jungles, plains and valleys, surrounded by pristine coasts, humankind saw the light of day. The life journey of the human has begun. I am looking in astonishment at the excavated skeleton of Mrs. Ples (Plesianthropos = almost human). Years ago she has been taken out of the cave where she lived in. It was done with great care; her bones shouldn't be broken! She is around 2 millions years old. Her skull is a bit smaller than mine, but a primitive human for sure.

I am in Maropeng, not far from Johannesburg in South Africa. The whole area here, all the caves of Sterkfontein is an oasis for paleontologists. This area is now protected and has been declared a World Heritage Site by the United Nations. It is totally understandable that this area is called: "*The cradle of humankind*" So many fossils of animals and humans have been found here. This is a fascinating museum, where the origin and development of human kind, but also of nature itself are on display. We also get a view of a future, which humankind can influence so negatively these days. I can label this museum as "The Ballad of humankind".

I can't help it that another narrative comes to mind. Also a story about the human race, and its life on mother earth, as the writer of Genesis 2 describes it. This is NOT a historical or scientific argumentation, and different from what I am looking at. You truly have to judge both on their own merit. The bible is a wonderful storybook that portrays humans so subtly with all their peculiarities and their relation to the divine presence in this world. It is a book for which no one will ever get the Nobel price for literature, simply because we don't know who the many, many writers of the stories are.

I can't tell you how grateful I am, that the bible is a storybook and not a book of facts. I cannot identify with facts, I cannot live within them. In stories I can. Because the stories of the bible are about me in the many rolls I play as a human during my lifetime. I am not only good, or only bad; we all contain many sides of humanity within us. That for me is the power of the bible. That is also why Jesus speaks to his followers in parables. You can live in the stories, identify with a person, a situation or even a thing. The parables make you think, regroup and give power to move forward.

The storyteller of Genesis 2 is a totally different person than the one who wrote Genesis 1. This story about the dead-alive place that only becomes a dwelling-place when the human is walking around is a much older story than the story about 7 days. In Genesis 2 the human is put in the limelight. What is a human, where are we, what do we have to do? The human is dust. Not made of dust, no just dust of the ground, the most humble material under the sun, that is who we are. It reminds us to be modest. We are dust, a piece of mud, muddling around on this world. We are as earthly as can be. Why have we been told that the first human on earth is called Adam? I have no clue where that comes from, as if it would be a given name like Ann, Mike or Mary. No 'Adam' is a class-name it only means 'earthling', made of dust of the ground. You and I, all of us are adam, and that is why Genesis 2 is a story of today, and in no way a description how things came to be in faraway times. You can't read the bible as something of a time long gone, it is the book of NOW. All of us are adam, earthling, taken out of adama, the earth. And we are totally dependent of that same earth. We are bound to her by a threefold umbilical cord. We come from her, return to her and in between, she feeds us. Adam and adama, earthling and earth

are bound together; rain or shine in an everlasting interdependency. This interdependency existed already a long, long time - before this story of Genesis 2 was composed, where Mrs. Ples and her offspring muddled on.

Driven by curiosity and trials and tribulations, pressured by circumstances, the human finds out that it can make fire and control of fire. Modern humans use this knowledge to develop rocket engines and rockets made it possible to get to the moon and outer space; here you see the evolution of our cognitive capacities. It is many; many generations later they start to use their vocal cords, form sounds, eventually evolving into speech. The voyage of discovery will never end; it made the human wander away from its origin, into the wide, wide world; from Africa to all the corners of the world. Fascinating. The human searches, experiences, the human evolves, and has a great ability to adjust. The human adapts to situations surrounding her and survives many dangers. The horizon cannot be the end; our drive to discover is of all ages; nowadays also beyond mother earth.

One of the questions answered in Genesis 2 is *where* are we? We have been told that this story is about a paradise. BUT the writer doesn't mention that at all. It is a garden, nothing else than the place where you live and work. For the writer it was Israel, where the people live, for you a different place. You don't have to look for it on a map, because this is the spot where YOU live and work, that piece of mother earth. It isn't a fairytale world, but a garden that needs human labor in order to let mother earth fulfill her purpose. We have to serve her with respect and knowing about our dependency of her. Too often we let the earth serve us and aren't servants to her anymore. She is sometimes moaning and crunching and she will most likely be better off without us.

Another question answered is: Are we only a spiritless body? Oh no don't you love the imagery of the writer, who pictures God as a human, (God is anthropomorphized we say, attributing human qualities to God) blowing spirit into our nostrils to become a spiritual being? Wouldn't it be great when all of us would follow that divine spirit? I am sure the world would be a lot better. You can see that in the most divinely inspired person I know. In Jesus and around him you can see what it is to live as we should, as spirit people.

And thus the human travels on, into the world. Is there a limit? It took the offspring of Mrs. Ples ages to spread around the world, where now people can live and work and serve the earth and each other. Said this way, it is rather bland. That is why we need storytellers, poets and hymn writers who all can say it in such wonderful poetic language. Without the stories of the Bible, the hymns we sing, I feel that life would be of poorer quality, more horizontal. Without the poetry of faith, the imagery of it, the world would certainly go downhill, not only "in how she expresses herself but surely also in spiritual richness, which is exactly what is lacking and we need so desperately these days.

I walk out of the museum, deeply impressed, a smile on my lips. Fascinated by this museum and pondering how we are just discovering the history of humankind, and **so** happy that I know of the poetry of faith. Amen