

OCTOBER
2020

GRACE NOTES
YOUR ACCESS TO
GRACE CHURCH



Creation and
Enuma Elish



GRACE NOTES

Creation and *Enuma Elish*

In Babylon, the life of the Israelites was completely shattered. “By the waters of Babylon, we sat down and wept when we remembered Zion.” Psalm 127 conveys their misery, despair, anguish and homesickness.

The captors hurled insults, shaking their heads: They (the Israelites) trusted in the Lord; let the Lord rescue them and deliver them. (Ps 22:8)

They scoffingly asked, “Sing us the song of joy and the song of Zion.” (Ps 137:3) The captives questioned: “Where was Yahweh?” They cried out: “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me. (us)?” (Ps 22:1)

What things made worse was that the Israelites were surrounded by the jubilation of the conquerors and by their hymns in praise of their triumphant god. The exiles looked up every day at the glorious Babylonian temple complex, called the *Esagila* – “the house of the raised head” – and at the enormous seven-story ziggurat *Etermenanki* - the temple of the foundation of heaven and earth.”

The temple and ziggurat were built by Nebuchardnezzar II, the most powerful and longest reigning king of the Babylonian Empire, in honor of the storm god, Marduk. Marduk was exalted as the master of the universe.

Every year when the Babylonians observed a grand New Year’s festival in Marduk’s honor, statues of other gods were taken down from their niches and carried in a grand public procession to the main sanctuary. On the festival’s fourth day, led by the king himself, there was a solemn recitation of a sacred text that had been inscribed on clay tablets in the remote past. The venerable text was the *Enuma Elish*, the Babylonian epic of creation.

But Yahweh did not forsake the Israelites forever. With startling suddenness, the Babylonia Empire began to fall apart. After the wake of Nebuchadnezzar's death, a succession of crisis weakened the state and the empire surrendered to the Persians on October 12, 539 BCE. A canny politician, Cyrus the Great, now liberated the enslaved Hebrews, allowing them to return to Judah.

To the captives, Cyrus was the chosen agent of Yahweh. "He is my shepherd," God says of Cyrus in the book of Isaiah, "and will accomplish all that I please; he will say to Jerusalem, You shall be rebuilt, and to the temple, your foundation shall be laid." (Isaiah 44:28)

The Hebrew exiles, who returned to Jerusalem, undertook the immense labor of rebuilding the Jerusalem Temple. But this building project was not enough for them. For a thousand years or more, they had had no single, collective sacred text. They embarked upon the immense intellectual labor to write and compile a sacred book out of all diverse records and stories.

They remembered the memories in the past. In Babylon, they had heard over and over again the ***Enuma Elish*** with its praise of Marduk, who created the first humans. The trauma of exile may well have triggered the key motivation to clarify their identity of who they were as well as to bring together the stories. It was in this unique situation that the bible seemed to have taken root.

Enuma Elish, is a hymn in praise of Marduk, which describes how the god Marduk became the king of the gods and the chief god of Babylon. The poem begins with a description of the world before creation:

- 1 When above the skies had not been named,
- 2 Nor earth below pronounced by name.

The first two words became the title of the poem, for *enuma elish* means "when above." Then, we are told two primeval realities, Apsu, the god of the fresh water, and Tiamat, the goddess of the salt waters:

- 3 There was Apsu, the first in order, their begetter,
- 4 And demiurge Tiamat, who gave birth to them all;
- 5 They had mingled their waters together

From their union the first generation of gods was born; among these were earth and sky. This myth explains how the earth and the sky came into being where the fresh waters of the Tigris and Euphrates issue into the salt water of the Persian Gulf, and a delta was formed.

The opening word of Genesis says, when God began to create, “the earth was a formless void” and there were also turbulent waters. Like *Enuma Elish*, the Bible offers the explanation of the structure of the cosmos, and the process by which these already existing realities were transformed into an orderly cosmos.

Verse 2 “Darkness covered the face of the deep and a wind from God swept over the face of the waters.” Here, the Hebrew word for “deep,” *tehom*, is linguistically related to the name of the goddess Tiamat.

We find another example of similarity between *Enuma Elish* and the Bible. In the last act of creation in Genesis 1:26, God said; “Let **us** make humankind in **our** image, according to our likeness.” Why did God use the plural form here if Yahweh would be one single being?

The use of the plural here probably refers to the **divine council**, namely, the assembly of the gods, which is invoked for the final and most significant act of creation. In *Enuma Elish*, the assembly of the gods ratifies Marduk’s decision to execute Qungu and from his blood to make humans:

Tablet VI 17 Marduk assembled the great gods
33 From his blood he created mankind

Why should we learn this sort of knowledge? In which way is it of help for our faith? Two are important. First, this kind of approach confirms the truth that the Bible is not a book of science, not a book written from eye-witnesses but a book for the formation of faith. It is a creed. It is the collection of poetry. It is hymns of praise. This means, the Bible is not perfect. Rather, it contains repetition, inconsistency, and contradiction within it.

Second, this approach also proves that the Bible was written by humans and those authors did not live in vacuum. Their knowledge reflected their times, their contemporary culture and civilization and philosophy. Therefore it is necessary to look at other writings and compare with them in order to better understand the meanings of a word or concept in a particular biblical passage.

Knowing that Genesis stories are not unique does not undermine the authority and dignity of the Bible. The power of the bible is, rather, that, in spite of its inconsistencies and contradictions, this sacred text continues to inspire us, invigorate us and illuminate our faith path today even 2500 years after its first start of collecting and compiling. Isn’t it amazing?

You Pastor *Kyu*

*Resources:

Michael D. Coogan, A Brief Introduction to the Old Testament: The Hebrews Bible In Its Context, Oxford University Press, 2009

Stephen Greenblatt, The Rise and fall of Adam and Eve, W.W. Norton & Company, 20

Sermons in October: For Spiritual Growth

- 10/ 4 Balance between Independence and Interdependence
- 10/11 Balance between Christ's Presence and Our Presence
- 10/18 Laity Sunday: My Faith Journey
- 10/25 Balance between Being and Doing
- 11/ 1 Balance between Grace and Works

OCTOBER PRAYER

I Said a Prayer For You Today

I said a prayer for you today and I know He must've heard~ I felt the answer in my heart although He spoke not a word. I didn't ask for wealth or fame (I knew you wouldn't mind) I asked Him to send treasures of a far more lasting kind! I asked that He be near you at the start of each new day to grant you health and blessings and friends to share your way! I asked for happiness for you in all things great and small~ but it was for His loving care I prayed most of all!

2020 The first 3 Quarters Finance Report

(January 1 ~ September 30)

- * Budget: \$134,485.00
- * Total Income: \$ 89,201.76
- * Total Expenses: \$ 80,706.97
- * Current Balance: \$ 8,494.79

***Thank you! Thank you! And more thank you!
You, such faithful servants and generous supporters!***

***** *Lay Leaders Report* *****

My Dear Friends in Christ!

Summer is now in the rear view mirror. October begins and before we know it the winter will be upon us. God is so wise to give us the seasons. Each one has its own beauty, each one comes for a time and moves on to the next. We can count on the change the calendar brings, even more we can count on God's love and His plans for His children.

The church goes through seasons of change. We've certainly experienced that in the recent months yet we gather together, we lift our voices and hearts to praise Him and the Lord's plans will be brought to completion in His time.

The Ad Council met on the 29th. The workings of the church were discussed. Trustees reported on building repairs and needs, finances were reported, upcoming church conferences were highlighted, ministry opportunities and programs were given unanimous support. This season in our church life might look different than past years but the heartbeat of Christ's church is alive and well, His people continue to look to Him first and foremost and serve Him with gladness.

Each season brings beauty, each one of us brings something beautiful to the Body of Christ. May we continue to look forward in great anticipation for what God has in store for us. We can in confidence because our hope is in Him.

"But Christ is faithful as the Son over God's house. And we are his house, if indeed we hold firmly to our confidence and the hope in which we glory."
Hebrews 3:6 NIV

Blessings all, Laurie



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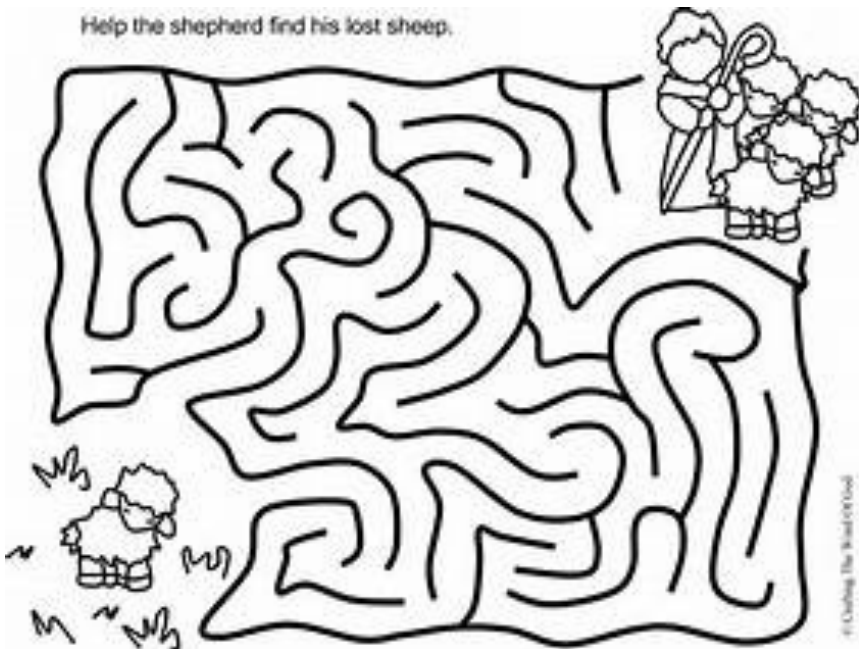
apostles	increase	faith
mustard	seed	mulberry
uprooted	planted	obey
servant	plowing	sheep
table	apron	drink
grateful	commanded	unprofitable

Lord's Prayer Maze

Our Father who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name.
Thy kingdom come.
Thy will be done...



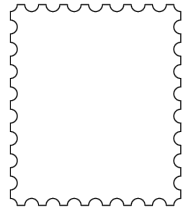
Help the shepherd find his lost sheep.





Grace

United Methodist Church
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Join us for Worship — Sunday at 10:30 am



