Earth Creature, the Spirit, and Commission—Genesis 2:4-20

4 This is the account of the heavens and the earth when they were created. When the LORD God made the earth and the heavens- 5 and no shrub of the field had yet appeared on the earth and no plant of the field had yet sprung up, for the LORD God had not sent rain on the earth and there was no man to work the ground, 6 but streams came up from the earth and watered the whole surface of the ground- 7 the LORD God formed the man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being. 8 Now the LORD God had planted a garden in the east, in Eden; and there he put the man he had formed. 9 And the LORD God made all kinds of trees grow out of the ground—trees that were pleasing to the eye and good for food. In the middle of the garden were the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. 10 A river watering the garden flowed from Eden; from there it was separated into four headwaters. 11 The name of the first is the Pishon; it winds through the entire land of Havilah, where there is gold. 12 (The gold of that land is good; aromatic resin and onyx are also there.) 13 The name of the second river is the Gihon; it winds through the entire land of Cush. 14 The name of the third river is the Tigris; it runs along the east side of Asshur. And the fourth river is the Euphrates.15 The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it. 16 And the LORD God commanded the man, "You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; 17 but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die." 18 The LORD God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him."19 Now the LORD God had formed out of the ground all the beasts of the field and all the birds of the air. He brought them to the man to see what he would name them; and whatever the man called each living creature, that was its name. 20 So the man gave names to all the livestock, the birds of the air and all the beasts of the field.

1. What strikes you about this creation story?
2. Is there anything particularly significant about verses 4-6?
3. How does the fact that we are made of dust affect our relationship to the earth? Or more simply, are we aliens?
4. How does the fact that we are made of dust and breath (spirit) affect our self-understanding and our understanding of life on earth?
5. In verse 15, Adam is both set in a garden and commissioned to "serve and protect" the garden. How should this affect our relationship to earth and its creatures?
6. How does the fact that the "beats" and the "birds" are made out of dirt, just like humans, inform our understanding of them?