

Sermon January 7, 2018 – Epiphany 1: The Baptism of Our Lord,

Chaos is Broken

Genesis 1:1–5



Dear Friends in Christ

Our meditation this morning is based on the Old Testament reading for today. And as we begin this meditation let me ask you, how do you react or what's your response when you find a major roadblock in your way? For some, even for me at times, the reaction we have is this: "Stop the world! I want to get off!"

You know that feeling when something out of your control happens and throws a major monkey wrench your way. For example, the coffee pot just exploded; or in my case, when my sermon is not done yet and the office computer decides to take the day off as I try to finish the sermon; or the dishwasher and the washing machine stage a rebellion and fill the house with soap and water. Now, these are but just minor annoyances, although minor, still can sidetrack us, but there those times when life is just downright chaotic, even hopeless.

Nobody likes chaos. We can't thrive under fear or when being bombarded by demands, worries, and problems from every direction. We go bananas! When the kids are late, you've got to get to work, and the dog tracks who-knows-what into the house, it feels like chaos, and we just want things to stop. Life can't exist in chaos.

I. Chaos reigns.

In the Book of Genesis today, Moses takes us back to the beginning of Creation. Even allows us to take a peek into those moments of prehistory—before the fall, before the rat race of modern life, before work, before crashing computers and cars that won't start. When we think about the book of Genesis, sometimes we think first of the Garden of Eden, of paradise or perfection, and miss what happened before the Garden of Eden. The time when there was God and only God, we see that there was chaos. And one thing is very clear—life cannot exist in the midst of chaos. Life cannot take place in the void of nothingness, and in our text we see that as the Spirit of God hovers over the waters, chaos reigns.

The Hebrew words used to describe this stage of pre-creation are *tohu wabohu*, a phrase that is difficult to translate into English. It means something like "formless void" or "swirling water mass" or "shapeless, unformed,

orderless thing.” It’s not evil; there’s no sin yet. But whatever the Hebrew means, the point is made. Life cannot exist where chaos reigns. You can’t build a castle on top of a black hole; it just won’t work. There is nothing solid on which to build. Life cannot exist here. For life to take place, chaos must be subdued and defeated.

While chaos reigns, life cannot go on. We know this all too well. God created the world by the power of his Word, and for a time it was beautiful, sinless. But that chaos soon after came roaring back in the form of a seductive serpent and a bite of the forbidden fruit. That was evil! From that moment on, the fall into sin assured us that life in the world would be a constant battle against chaos. Cut off from the Creator, Adam and Eve and all their children right down to you and me today are caught up in a world, immersed in chaos—is doing its best to tear itself apart. And that is evil.

It started badly enough. You remember how it started, if you’re a farmer, thorns and thistles in your field, the sweat of your brow and crops that fail anyway are bad enough. If you’re a woman, pain in childbirth is bad enough. Those are the effects of sin, the chaos, we heard about right away in Genesis 3. But it goes farther, it doesn’t end in chaos, it ends in death, an eternal separation from God. Yes, in the day that you eat of it, you will surely become doomed to die. Those were for starters. Chaos and death!

But you also know how it’s been since. You and I feel this chaos every day. We can sense it stalking us like a wild animal hunts prey. We feel the void closing in on us when the job is lost and the bills are due. We feel the void trying to swallow us whole at the hospital and at the funeral home. Chaos takes the shape of addiction or depression. Chaos confronts us as Christians as we suffer persecution and ungodly agendas are forced down our cultural throats. Name your poison—abortion, violence, abuse, neglect, the sins others commit against us and the sins we commit with our hands, minds, and hearts—they all lead us to the edge of the abyss. The void, the chaos, the enemy of life seeks to devour us like a roaring lion.

Some of these chaotic effects we bring on ourselves by our own evil living. Some are indeed done to us by others’ sins. No, it’s not that every time the computer locks up or the washing machine goes on the blink or, more seriously, we lose a job or suffer a terrible accident it’s because of some particular sin we’ve committed. But in every case, the root problem is that sin—Adam’s sin, Eve’s sin, my sin, your sin, the world’s sin—has separated us from God, and thus thoroughly corrupted his perfect creation, that’s it! Chaos!

But for life to exist, the chaos in the world and in our lives must be subdued, even destroyed. The enemies of sin, Satan, and death must be

broken for us, for we have no strength of our own and the cosmic struggle we face is just too big.

II. Chaos is broken.

That's why when we look at the chaos in our lives, we say, "Stop the world! I want to get off!" But then our God, who hovers over the void says, "Let there be." "Let there be light!" And light spring up! Yes, with his powerful Word, chaos is broken. Back then God saw what he had made, and, behold, it was good! The formless mass is brought to structure, form is given, and life abounds, not because God had to do it, but because of his limitless love. God our Father created life out of nothing. Chaos is broken and life is the result. In the void, in the black hole, in the chaos, life cannot abide, but with the Word of God there is life, life, and more life.

This is God's world—it all belongs to him. Everything is his, from the cattle on a thousand hills to the people from a thousand nations. Everything and everyone is his creation. He made it and he will sustain it and he will redeem it for himself.

So when the chaos of evil threatens to overtake his children, his creation, or his Church, it is God's living Word that brings order, peace, and salvation. His Word created the world and his Word made flesh and blood in Jesus Christ re-created you and me to save us from sin, death, and the devil. That incarnate Word came to us at Bethlehem's manger, and today it stands in the Jordan River with John. Here the mighty Son of God stands with lowly sinners. My sins, your sins, and the sins of the world were poured on his head as Jesus undergoes a sinner's Baptism. The Father who called the light good now praises the Light of the world and proclaims an eternal "very good" upon Jesus as he says, "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased" (Mk 1:11).

When chaos was in reigning, and in a way that no one could dare to imagine, God the Son re-created us. Not in power but in weakness, with humility and service, with lowliness and stripes, with a cross and nails and a spear thrust into his side. At that place called Skull Hill, Jesus re-creates a fallen world and rescues hell-bent sinners by dying their death. When the baptized Son of God said from the cross, "It is finished," he spoke deeper truth than we can ever fathom. His baptized, crucified flesh redeemed our fallen, sinful flesh. By removing the sin that separated us from God, Jesus' death reconciled us to him, restored our relationship with the one who brings order where there was chaos, perfection where there was a formless void, paradise where there was a black hole. Jesus' perfect life redeemed our despicable performance and nasty choices. His beauty re-creates our ugliness and makes us beautiful in the eyes of our loving Father.

Dear friends in Christ the void is not your fate. The chaos of sin, death, and devil has no power over you. God has created us and re-created us in Jesus Christ, our Lord. The Spirit of God hovered over the waters at the moment of creation. The Spirit of God descended upon Jesus at the Jordan River. The Spirit of God washed you and re-created you at your Baptism. Today, we thank God that our baptized, crucified, and resurrected Lord Jesus has broken the power of chaos and death and brings us into his kingdom.

So what do you now when you encounter chaos and void? Do you also say "Stop the world! I want to get off!" As in trying to run from chaos to more chaos? Or would you say Christ have mercy on me, and take from this chaos? Be assured that God's words of Creation and recreation are for you today. That the light of His word separates your darkness, takes you from the darkness of chaos into the beauty of his light.

May you live in the beauty of His creation, renewed and fruitful! May he bring you to his light and his light shine your dark path!

Amen.