

Chaos and Order  
 January 10, 2021  
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 Genesis 1:1-7  
 Preaching in the Age of COVID 19

May the God who creates us...

Good Morning

If you are hoping for a sermon that directly addresses the deeply disturbing assault on our government this past week by a group of rioters, I invite you to read or to watch my sermon from our January 7 Vigil for the Nation. The text of that sermon may be found on the Episcopal Diocese of Michigan website or our diocesan Facebook page. That sermon is entitled, "And Yesterday Happened—What is Truth?"

This morning, ever mindful of the events of our nation, I'm exploring the first piece of scripture we encounter when we open our bibles.

In the beginning. In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind of water swept over the face of the waters. Then God said, "Let there be light." And God saw that the light was good. Genesis 1:1-4b

And so begins one written record of our attempt, some 700 years ago, to understand our world's origins and explore much of humanity's deeply held belief that there is and has always been something more than what we can see and know now.

Biblical theologian Richard Boyce (*Feasting on the Word, Year B. Vol. 1 pp 219-223*) places the presumed origins of this text in an extremely helpful historical context. He notes that for the Israelites, in many ways their true existence as a people began, not with the separation of the heavens and the earth or the day from the night, but rather their separation from their time of servitude and slavery in the land of Egypt. Their separation as Moses parted the Red Sea and allows them to escape from Egypt is the true beginning of the Israelites as God's chosen ones. Before that time with Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Sarah, Rebecca, Leah and Rachel, they were bands of families with patriarchs and matriarchs, but with Moses and their escape from bondage, they become a people. A people who wander in the desert for 40 years and eventually make their way to God's promised land.

There in that land of promise, they settle, they love and laugh and learn and flourish. They follow God's law, and they stray from God's law. Eventually as centuries go by, they stray so far from God's ways, that God allows their cities to overrun and their temple demolished, razed.

Now as they dwell in exile, unable to sing their songs in a foreign land, the priests, the theologians and poets of the time begin to think about the time before now, the time before King David, the time before Moses, the time before time. They begin to contemplate, where and how and why this all began.

The myths and stories of the day, of the surrounding cultures and countries are consulted and some parts even incorporated. But several pieces differ. There are not multiple gods with convoluted family structures, coming and going, warring, fighting, coming together, moving apart. Instead there is just one God: only one God. As Biblical scholar Karen Armstrong says,

“A single God center stage, the sole source of power and life, totally in control of his [sic] creation...God need only speak and his words articulate the formless waste of chaos, giving it grammar, shape and form.”( In the Beginning p 9.)

The priests and theologians of the 6th century before the common era, began to tell the story that God created moving over the formless void, long ago God created and shaped and formed chaos into structure and meaning, day after day God created and each day, God saw that what God created was good.

Why turn at that point in time, during that dire time in their history why then did they write the story of God creating? Were they not thinking, were they not wondering is God here? Does God care? Where is God? Is our God still acting?

Could it be, they wonder the people in exile, that God’s animating, coalescing force has never stopped? Could it be they posit to themselves, that even now as our captors’ rule, even now God is still calling and creating?

We are accustomed to hearing the lines, “When God Created...” but the Hebrew can also quite likely be interpreted as saying, “When God began to create...” If we think of God’s work in creation as never being completed, as an ongoing task, then imagine if you will how inspiring that might be for a people feeling as if all they knew and counted for certain has suddenly been pulled out from under them. Imagine how a people who feel as if the tectonic plates of their lives and of their country has shifted, may feel, knowing that God is not done. God is not done forming, imagine how they might have felt then and maybe how we might feel now, knowing that God is still creating our world, still active in our world, still not done with us or our world.

When God began to create, God day after day, brought order out of chaos and saw that it was good.

My friends, our world is shifting, our country is like water in a bathtub, sloshing back and forth, not yet finding our new level. This friends is good news. When God began to create, when God began to put this world into motion so many billions of years ago, God has not stopped. God is not done with us. We are not alone in this primordial

mess of ours. In this time of Epiphany, may we open ourselves to God's creating power, so that we too might join in bringing form and meaning to the chaos of our world. Amen.