

"The First Day of the New Creation"

TEXTS: Genesis 1: 1-5

Mark 1: 4-11

When I was a little kid, every once and awhile a terrible feeling would come over me when I thought about the vastness of creation. Somehow I knew that the universe was very large, almost too large to even think about. Nevertheless, I did think about it and was overwhelmed when I realized how little I was. I was only a small speck in the vast creation and I was terrified.

Questions filled my mind: What was the meaning of life? Where did I fit in? How did it all begin?

My questions and fears soon faded as other thoughts filled my mind. Eventually, the terror of such contemplations vanished completely. I suppose that I became so wrapped up in the life of the playground and school that I didn't have time to worry about the meaning of existence. I would also credit my parents and teachers who instilled my life with a sense of meaning and order.

Despite my occasional thoughts that the universe might be chaotic and without meaning, I eventually came to believe that there is order and purpose in existence. Needless to say, I believe this order is created and directed by God.

Almost all human beings believe that a divine being created the universe now directs the affairs of human life. Without such a belief, terrible thoughts about a vast and meaningless universe would overwhelm us. We live our lives with

the assumption that God gives order and meaning to life.

We maintain this belief, almost without thinking about it and often forgetting to give God credit and praise. Nonetheless, belief in God as the creator is essential for a meaningful human life because it holds back thoughts of a chaotic and meaningless universe.

The ancient people who wrote the Book of Genesis also had thoughts about the chaos of creation. In many ways, their situation was more terrifying than ours. They didn't have the perspective of modern science which now describes many of nature's mysteries.

They didn't understand the wonders of the creation we now take almost for granted: weather, stars, the sun, and the moon. They also didn't have a vast tradition of stories which taught them generation after generation that God directed the course of human history. They had only themselves and their experiences.

To overcome feelings of helplessness and meaninglessness when thinking about the universe, they began to tell stories about how it must have been when God created the earth. They drew upon their own experiences and fears to explain what God did when the world was made. For example, they surely felt more secure when their feet were on dry ground.

Except for a few venturesome sailors, the sea was a terrifying and unknown place. No one knew what was beyond the edge of the seas. Storms could plunge sailor and ship off the edge of the earth into a deep, dark chaos where there was no air or light. Fear of such a watery chaos may have been the biggest worry of ancient people.

They imagined that the universe was like a vast, formless ocean before God created solid ground. Just as importantly, Genesis also proclaims that God pronounced this creation good. This is the most important detail the creation story. God created the world and everything in it and declared it to be good.

And yet, we also know that there is evil in the world. Throughout our lives, we observe and experience evil. Even though we believe God created a good world, we also know that evil infects creation.

The root cause of evil in our world is the selfishness of individual human beings. When taken together, the selfishness of people creates the evil which infests the world. The good world created by God been disrupted by this evil. We--the human beings of the earth-- are at fault for this chaos. We cannot avoid responsibility by claiming that our enemies are the source of all evil. Every human being is sinful and participates in the evil disorder of the world.

We may feel despair when confronting the disorder we have created. And yet, God still has a plan for the world: The earth will be recreated and reformed again and again in God's image. Our despair about the disorder of the world will be overcome by a new creation.

As Christians, believe Jesus Christ is the new creation. In him, we are given the opportunity to overcome the sin and disorder which pervades human life. Through him, a new creation of peace and justice will fill the world.

Today we are celebrating the Baptism of Jesus--a day which marks the beginning of the new creation.

Reports of Jesus' baptism in the gospels have many striking parallels to the story of creation in Genesis 1. In Genesis 1, there is a watery chaos. Out of this disorder, God created solid land and proclaimed it good. In Mark, chapter 1, the story of Jesus also begins with water as Jesus is baptized in the Jordan River. The churning water of the river reminds us of the watery chaos before creation. As in Genesis 1, a new creation emerges out watery chaos. As Jesus comes out of the river after baptism, the heavens open up and God speaks:

***"You are my Son, the Beloved;
with you I am well pleased."***
(Mark 1: 11.)

God was announcing Jesus Christ as the new creation. Just as the first creation was good, this new creation will also be good, offering salvation to all people who accept Jesus Christ as God's "beloved" Son.

Jesus, and the new creation he offers, is a unique aspect of the Christian faith. Along with all the other people of the world, we believe God gives form and meaning to the world. Christians also recognize the disorder and evil of the world.

There is chaos in creation by centuries of human greed and sin. As the new creation, Jesus overpowers the chaos and evil of the world and gives new possibilities to human

life. We participate in this new creation when we admit our sin, repent, and do God's will. Jesus became the new creation when he was baptized in the Jordan River.

He did this not to have his own sins washed away, but rather as an invitation for us to have our sins washed away in the new creation.

The day of your own baptism was the first day of the new creation for you. Whether you were baptized as a child or adult, you were selected by God to participate in the new creation. Every day each one of us face the challenge of living our lives so that we are faithful to the vision to the new creation God gave us when we were baptized.

Our calling as Christians is to proclaim reality of the new creation in Jesus Christ. We do this through love of other people and our deeds of service. We also proclaim the new creation when we celebrate the Lord's Supper as banquet of new life for ourselves and others. When accept the duty of service in the Church we are also proclaiming new creation. Today we are ordaining and installing new elders and deacons. They have accepted the challenge to serve God in this special way.. They have also agreed to allow their lives to be recreated so that they can serve God as leaders in the Church. Through Jesus Christ, the new creation has already overcome the evil and disorder of the world.

All of us, especially our newly elected officers, have the duty to accept and proclaim the reality of the new creation offered by Jesus Christ. This is our most

important calling in the New Year and in the years to come.

Let us pray.

"Praise and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and strength to our God for ever and ever."

AMEN