

January 10, 2021, the Baptism of the Lord (Year B)
We've Only Just Begun

Genesis 1:1-5

¹In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, ²the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters. ³Then God said, "Let there be light"; and there was light. ⁴And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness. ⁵God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day.

John Lithgow or was it Winston Churchill? Watching the historical fiction drama *The Crown* on Netflix can get a bit confusing. I must remind myself that Mrs. Thatcher was never an FBI agent investigating paranormal occurrences, but Gillian Anderson makes a frighteningly good Maggie Thatcher. Churchill said when the British drove Rommel out of Egypt, "Now this is not the end. It is not even the beginning of the end. But it is, perhaps, the end of the beginning." There is a school of Jewish mysticism that believes we are still on day six of creation. It clears up a lot of problems around all the chaos lying about in our world because it's not done yet.

In 1981 Rabbi Harold Kushner published his book titled, **Why Bad Things Happen to Good People**. It's a bit too easy to get the title confused and wonder why good things happen to bad people. He laid out a choice and backed it up with scripture. God is either all powerful or God is good. You can't have it both ways because an all-powerful God who lets villages succumb to plague, or cities fall to earthquakes is culpable and therefore not good. However mysterious the ways of God are they do not absolve the torture of innocent children. Even the evil done by man's inhumanity to man is ordained by an all-powerful God. If God is not better than the best human that tyrant needs to be taken down a peg.

So, what does Scripture say? Never is God omnipotent in the Bible, God is just more powerful than us. God is more powerful than we imagine but there are limits to that power. In the idea that we are on day six of creation God has made us humans to help in the cause of taming chaos. We extend the work of finishing creation. It is possible to look at the world's evil and say,

“that needs work.” It’s a half-baked world that a good God is working tirelessly to bring to a marvelous end.

In the beginning God pronounced the work good and that can be taken as off to a good start. It came as a great relief not to explain what possible good God might have in mind for taking the life of someone’s child through cancer. Believe me, the task of defending an all-powerful God is beyond exhausting. Of course that makes our outlook a bit scarier, but it rescues you from defending God who if God is all powerful is an abuser of children, a vindictive ax wielding potentate. I once complained that many people go to church to avoid God. It works like this – we all know that we deserve God’s righteous wrath in the way kidnap victims feel they deserve their fate – a Stockholm syndrome sort of faith. In order to keep God from doing bad things to us we make religious motions to make him happy. If I don’t do this, God will make me suffer.

That’s hard to reconcile with a good God who loves the creation and calls it good. We need to be rescued from such an image. Thank the Lord we have ample examples in our lives where God’s love infused us. We have gifts of relationships and moments of joy. We can work on the problem of evil alongside God taming the chaos out of which creation is being called.

This Sunday is designated as in memory of the baptism of Jesus. John 3:16 tells us that God so loved the world God gave us his son that all you need to do is believe this and your life will be lived in company with them as the universe spins out to final completion. It is still day six and God has not rested.

Concluding Prayer: Eternal God, at the baptism of Jesus in the River Jordan you proclaimed him your beloved Son, and anointed him with the Holy Spirit. Grant that all who are baptized into his name may keep the covenant they have made, and boldly confess him as Lord and Savior; who with you and the Holy Spirit lives and reigns, one God, in glory everlasting. Amen.