

1 In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.^[a] ²Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness covered the surface of the watery depths, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the surface of the waters. ³Then God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. ⁴God 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." There was an evening, and there was a morning: one day.

Organized Chaos

Christmas is over. I know I'm disappointed too. The tree just didn't look so good so we took it down, last week even, before Christmas was actually over last Thursday on the 12th day of Christmas. We vacuumed up a pile of needles, put away the ornaments, and by we – I mean the children. I'd say it's been a fairly normal week but that's not quite the truth. It's not every week when you see Americans storm the capitol. It's not every week that someone slides off the road, over a transformer, and knocks out power to the church. It's not every week that we say good bye to family. I'd say it's been a fairly chaotic week.

But I doubt it has anything in comparison to the first week of creation. We are only looking at the first day and yet in those short verses we find a chaotic world unfit for life. We find the formless and void, the darkness and the watery depths, but we also find our God at work creating and calling into being, and rejoicing, "It's beautiful!" Yes we find God at work in creation. And he's still at work.

You might wonder, "Well what good is that for us? Isn't there something practical that we can do? How can we be better people? How can we better handle the chaotic world around us by looking at the first verses of the bible that many of us already have memorized?" And the answer is this, we see our God at work and the mighty God who creates is also the God who saves, redeems, and restores. So you might not find five tips to a better you. You might not figure out how to prepare a budget or plan for the chaotic world in which we live but you will find your God at work for you.

But these verses are so familiar. "*In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.*" We confess them every single week. I believe in God the Father Almighty maker of heaven and earth." If there is any verse more familiar it would be John 3:16. Genesis 1:1 has one up on John 3:16, it's easier to find. It's in the beginning. And that means we are at the start of time, space, and matter. There was no time before this. This beginning is without an article which means it can't be translated as, "The beginning of God's creating." It's the beginning. Those who say otherwise are just fooling themselves and can't read Hebrew.

What was God doing before this? When people asked Martin Luther what God was doing before creation he would respond, "Making sticks with which to beat people who ask such questions." But Moses says, "Creating." A word only used by God. God is doing only what God can do, calling into being from nothing. We teach creation out of nothing. What did he make? *The heavens*, that's plural, and intensive form, and that means not just the sky above us but the heavens beyond that, the final frontier. *And the earth*. This is not a title this is the work of the first day. God creates the matter he needs for the rest of his creative work on the first day. God was busy. He's at work. But creation is not done yet. It's a bit of a mess at this point.

The Hebrew expression reminds me of a professor of mine who used to write *Tobu wavobou* at the top of papers lacking in quality and content. *Tobu wavobou* means formless and void. *Tobu* speaks of the unformedness and it can mean waste but only in the sense of not yet being put into shape. It can't mean a previous creation that has already fallen into catastrophe. *Bobu* comes from the root "to be empty," It speaks of a region without inhabitants of any kind: Deserted. These words tell us that creation must be shaped and formed and populated because it's not ready yet. Something must happen before it can be populated. There are two things lacking for life, "*Darkness covered the surface of the watery depths and the Spirit of God was hovering over the surface of the waters.*" Creation is wrapped in darkness

and the watery depths are surging and raging waters. This is anything but a peaceful and uniform world. It's chaotic. And God speaks, "*Let there be light!*" The most essential prerequisite to life is called into being. Before light bearers have even been called into existence, stars and moon are on the fourth day. But God is already at work, creating and dividing.

So what's there for us in this? You've noticed the subject haven't you? It's God, God, God, God... and that's because the Bible is God's story, not man's story. It's a God centered book, not explaining God or answering our every desire and question we might have. It's a history of the times God spoke to humanity and this is how it started. But we like to think about ourselves. After all, I'm my favorite person. We like to believe that we have the power to make our own choices either good or bad, that we have our own free will, and that we can make the world a better place. Creation however shows us a different subject, "God created." And creation is the object, the recipient. And what God created is very good.

But we don't see it that way anymore. Our generation no longer believes that creation is good. Our generation likes to believe that God makes mistakes and that I really should be this or that gender because I feel that way. That he really should have interfered and stopped the massacre that took place in Pakistan or the virus that escaped from China. Creation is groaning, subject to futility. Rather than tending the good creation as the vocation given us by the creator (Genesis 1:26), we battle against it, and it battles against us. Sin wants to place us as the subject of the story, not God.

We don't want a God who creates all things because if he did then he would have a claim on us. But we'll create other gods, lesser gods in our own image. We'll even make ourselves gods, who rule over creation with our knowledge. Cure all illness, create endless energy, and hold back the seas themselves. But death is never cheated. And even though we've done our best to hold back the ocean and rivers they fail us. Our oil runs out on beaches, coal scars the land. "Science" is not the problem. We have taken God's gifts of science and knowledge and made them our masters. We are out of place.

But God spoke on the first day of creation. He brought light from the darkness. He separated light and dark and he will continue speaking things into being. There are six days of creation. God speaks. God speaks even after his good creation has turned against him. He spoke to Adam and Eve calling them back to him. He spoke to Abram. He spoke to Moses, the prophets, and apostles. The bible is the history of times that God spoke to Humanity. Then the Word of God became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We hear him speak again in complete control of his creation. To the raging waters on the Sea of Galilee, "Be still." To the deaf and blind, "Be opened." To the lame, "Walk."

Before he began his ministry he stood at our side and was baptized and God the Father voiced his approval, "*This one, This one is my beloved son. With him I am well pleased.*" The gospel continues on with God as the subject as God acts to redeem his creation. He sent his son. Who suffered and died for the sins of the world. He went to the cross for us. For our sin he was crucified. Jesus did all of this for us. He demonstrates his love for us. He rose from the dead and still works through his Word. He still speaks through pastors and teachers, his people.

God's word is powerful and effective. It works. It does what it says and it says what it does. It creates what he calls into being. But it may not look like much. When God works through his word it never is. It looks insignificant people even complain, "It looks like bread and wine to me... It's just a little bit of water. This isn't practical. I haven't learned anything new. Or, the pastor isn't that great, his message could use more work." It may look insignificant but his Word is at work accomplishing the purpose for which he sent it. We don't see the Holy Spirit but God promises he is there. We don't hear the Father's voice booming from heaven, "My beloved," but baptism declares it. We don't see Jesus purifying the baptismal waters and giving us his perfect life but it's there. We see his

Genesis 1:1-5

1st Sunday after Epiphany

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Word at work in baptism creating faith in baptism. We know that God claims us as his own and connects us to Jesus death. And if we are connected to his death then we are also connected to his life. Instead of looking forward to death you look back to death. And now when we look at this creation, this chaotic world in which we live we aren't afraid. He has forgiven all our sins.

Genesis 1:1-5 puts us back in place: God is our creator. We are his creation. Mark 1:4-11 tells us how Jesus took our place. Romans 6:1-11 tells us how God has connected us to him. There is a tremendous amount of comfort here. If our all-powerful God is able to create and bring order out of the initial chaos, if he has the power to call into being and speak to things that are not so that they might be – then he has the power to recreate us by his word. But if your god is unable to create a world in six days, if your god is made in your image and he is more of a fool than you, then you aren't worshipping the one true, the God of the Bible. That's a false god of your own invention.

The one true God, however, has revealed himself. He has made himself known. This season of Epiphany we celebrate God revealed to the nations. Christianity isn't just about me and Jesus. God sent his son into the flesh to die for you, but not for you alone. He came for all people – those already your brothers and sisters in the church, as well as those who have not yet been joined to the church. The kingdom of God is not just your salvation. It's for others as well, that's why Jesus taught us to pray, "Our Father," and not, "My Father." God has richly blessed humanity. He even gets us involved in the act of creation, "the two become one," and then there are three. God also allows us to make use of his mighty word which brings about a new creation even in this chaotic world

In this world we have problems. Christmas is over. Next week may be worse than last. But God is still in control no matter how hard humanity tries to prove otherwise. God is still in control of his creation which he loves and for which he died. This story isn't about you. It's about our God who is good and his mercy endures forever.

Amen.