

Sermon Draft

Text: Genesis 1:1–5

Sermon: Out of Chaos

The celebration of the Circumcision and Name of Jesus on January 1 reminded us of how Jesus placed himself under the Law for sinners with the shedding of his blood. The Baptism of Our Lord once again demonstrates how Jesus stands with sinful human beings by submitting to a sinner's Baptism in the Jordan River.

Our Psalm points us to the power of the Lord's voice six times (Ps 29:3, 4, 5, 7, 8, and 9), providing connections to both the Old Testament Reading and Gospel. The voice of the Lord speaks both in creation (Genesis 1:3) and in Jesus' Baptism (Mark 1:11).

This demonstrates both the creative and re-creative power of God's Word.

The same Word of God has created and re-created us in the waters of Baptism. In our Collect we prayed to be faithful in our callings as God's children and that eternal life be our inheritance.

"Stop the world! I want to get off!" This is the reaction most of us have when we run into a major roadblock in our day. We all experienced that feeling when something out of our control happens and throws a major monkey wrench our way. The coffee pot just exploded; our computer decides to take the day off as we try to finish an important project at work; the dishwasher and the washing machine stage a rebellion and fill the house with soap and water. Most of the time we get sidetracked with minor annoyances, but there are other times when life is downright chaotic.

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, we'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.

In the Book of Genesis today, Moses takes us back to the beginning and even before. We get to 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 encounter Genesis, we may first think of the Garden of Eden, of paradise or perfection, but here at the very beginning—at the time when there is God and only God—we find 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 right now, as the Spirit of Yahweh hovers over the waters, chaos reigns.

The Hebrew words used to describe this stage of pre-creation is a phrase that is difficult to translate into English. It means something like “formless void” or “swirling water mass” or “shapeless, unformed, order-less 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. We 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, but the chaos soon after came roaring back in the form of a seductive serpent and a bite of forbidden fruit. That was evil! From that moment on, the fall into sin assured us that life in the world would be a pitched 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 doing its best to tear itself apart. And that is evil.

It started badly enough. 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.

Oh, and death. Yes, in the day that you eat of it, you will surely become doomed to die. Those were for starters. Chaos.

But we also know how it's gone since. We feel the 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 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 beckon 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' sin. 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. Chaos!

For life to exist, the chaos in the world and in our lives, must be subdued. The enemies of sin, Satan, and death must be broken for us, for we have no strength of our own and this cosmic job is just too big.

You and I look at the chaos in our lives and say, "Stop the world! I want to get off!" Yahweh, our God, hovers over the void and says, "Let there be." With his powerful Word, chaos is broken. And God saw what he had made, and, behold, it was good! The formless mass is brought to heel 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"*** (Mark 1:11).

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 Golgotha, 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 wretched performance and squalid choices. His beauty re-creates our ugliness and makes us beautiful in the eyes of our loving Father.

Beloved 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.

Amen