

Baptism of Our Lord-January 7,2024

Baltic and East Nidaros Lutheran Parish

Genesis 1:1-5 and Mark 1:4-11

"Are You?...You Are?" Sermon by Pastor Randall J. Questad

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and from his Son who was baptized to wash away your sins forever, Jesus Christ. Amen

On this "Baptism of Our Lord" Sunday, we see several similarities and a few contrasts to what took place when God created the world in the creation story as we heard from Genesis and when new life is created in you as Mark describes the baptism of Jesus in the River Jordan.

The Creation story is one of the first bible stories that I remember hearing as a child, and I have since read and now taught the first account of the Creation story many times for over a half a century now. But it was not until this past week that I learned an important detail that I have always overlooked. I was always taught that God is more accurately described as a creator, not just a maker of heaven and earth, even though today we describe him as the maker of heaven and earth when we confess our faith using the Nicene Creed today. A creator makes out of nothing, but a maker is more like a baker who has some essential ingredients on hand and a recipe to follow before making something such as a cake. However, this time when I read the Creation story, I learned that although my ears wanted to hear as I had heard so many times that there was only darkness and a formless void, this time my ears heard that there was something already present when the Lord began his creative work. From the beginning, there was water.

The Lord never takes a day to create water. The water already existed. The Lord, however, simply speaks into the waters that were above and below the dome of the and creates the sky and the dry land on the second and third day of creation. The first reading for today describes the Lord's creative work on the first when he separated the darkness from the light with his voice. God said, "Let there be light." And it was so. There was evening and there was morning, the first day. Darkness was not eliminated, but the darkness gave way to the greater light that ruled the day.

Most Christians don't have much trouble believing that God is the creator of heaven and earth. We can't explain how everything all got started, so we trust that God created all things. We believe that all three members of the Trinity were present in this creation story. We are told that the wind or the breath or spirit of the Lord swept over the face of the waters before light was created. We learn from the first words of the gospel of John that Jesus is the Word of God and he was this word that was spoken as something new was created each day. We know that it was God's voice who spoke everything into existence. The 29th Psalm that we recited today reminds us that the voice of the Lord has the power to create, and it has the power to destroy. Yes, I think it's safe to say that most Christians don't have any problem believing in the Creation story that happened with the voice of the Lord.

There are several similarities to the Creation story and the Baptism of Jesus. There is water present before anything more happens. However, nothing happens without the voice of the Lord speaking into the water. Just as the Trinity was all present and accounted for in the Creation story, the Trinity was present at the baptism of Jesus. God the Father did the speaking, the Spirit descended upon Jesus so that he could hear what the Lord had to say to him when he was baptized by John in the Jordan River. In the Creation story, the voice of the Lord came through the formless void and down into the world that he was creating. In the Baptism of Jesus, the voice pierced through the wilderness and came down from heaven and into the waters of the Jordan River to speak to his Beloved Son. The words of the Lord are few on each day of creation. On

the first day, the Lord says, "Let there be light." There are quotation marks around only those four words, but the power of those four words did exactly what they intended to do. There was no hesitation or resistance from the darkness to decide if light would appear and separate it from the darkness. There is no "to be continued" at the end of the first day so that we must wait for the next day to see if the Lord's voice was strong enough to be heard and accomplished what it commanded. The Lord's words are also few that came down from heaven to Jesus when he was baptized. "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased." Twelve mostly short words, but like in the Creation story, they do exactly what the Lord promised they would do.

As I said, most Christians will believe the power of the few words that are spoken in the Creation story, but many Christians question the ability of the Lord's voice when it comes down to you in the waters of baptism to create new life in you. Many want to think that there is a "to be continued" that must be waited for for baptism to do what the Lord says it will do. Many want to give the Lord a little time to see if we will behave like beloved children before believing what the Lord tells us in our baptisms. It isn't just us to blame for our questioning. Satan cannot wait to show up after a person has just received a promise from the Lord and turn the words around from "You are a child of God!" and whisper the question "Are you really a Child of God?".

It is human nature, or it has become a part of our sinful nature to question the goodness of God especially when he speaks to us. At the end of each day of creation, the Lord called the day good. The Lord spoke to you just as he did Jesus when he was baptized and called you good and loved. But when you feel you can make it on your own without the Lord or if circumstances in your life are giving Satan the opportunity to question if God really is for you, we doubt if God's baptismal promise is not clinging to you as the Lord said it would. It doesn't take much for Satan to change the Lord's "You are!" into his "Are You?"

This past week, I had my one-year post op appointment to have each of my hip replacements X-rayed to see how they were doing. It didn't help to have a few doubts after watching a CBS news story earlier this year on the failure of certain replacement parts. I learned from my first appointment when I was X-rayed to bring along a pair of my own shorts rather than try to fit into the disposable paper one size fits all shorts that they would provide for you. After the initial questions by the surgeon's nurse, I was told to get ready, and another technician took me to the X Ray room to get the images taken. I was led back to the room and waited for the surgeon to speak to me. I wanted to believe I was doing ok, but until I heard the voice of the one who did the work and looked at the X ray images, I couldn't be certain. Soon the PA who assisted in each of my surgeries, who I really liked, appeared, and started the computer and brought up the images that were just taken. His first words were, "Well, I've got some good news." , but before I gave him a chance for him to tell me the good news, the skeptic in me feared that some bad news must be about to follow. He didn't ask me if I wanted to hear the good news or the bad news first. He told me that he had good news for me. I was glad to know that my interruption of what he had to say, and my skepticism couldn't change the good news that he had for me.

The Lord has spoken good news to you today. In the beginning, there was water when you were baptized. It was then that you received the Holy Spirit that opened your ears so that you could hear the Lord declare his favor toward you. Satan's attempted interruptions or your doubts cannot change the promise the Lord gave to you when he spoke into the waters and claimed you as his beloved child. The voice of the Lord is a powerful voice. His voice does what it says. The voice of the Lord speaks to you again today, "You are my Beloved Child; with you I am well pleased." Amen