

Pastor Joe Polzin
 Genesis 1:1-5
 “Breaking the Chaos”
 Year B – The Baptism of Our Lord
 January 7, 2018

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ.

There’s a long-running series of TV commercials for a well-known insurance company that depicts scene after scene of catastrophic events, usually due to human mistakes or negligence, and that features a human character called “Mayhem.” He is the chaos personified, and his tagline is, “Protect yourself from Mayhem like me.” Have you seen these? And I have the same reaction every time I see them, I cringe the moment I see that tree branch crushing the car, or a fire starting in the house, or an unattended grill exploding. The chaos depicted in those commercials, though humorous, is also a bit unsettling.

Generally speaking, we don’t like chaos in our lives. We prefer order. But most of the time, we don’t get to choose when life is orderly or chaotic. Chaos seems to happen at the worst times, and can even seem to happen all at once. You spill your coffee, the computer crashes and loses everything you were just working on, the washing machine breaks or floods the house, the car won’t start, the kids or grandkids get sick. Some days, it seems like chaos reigns. And you get that feeling that any semblance of normal life is impossible, and you desperately crave anything that will break the chaos and just restore some order.

In our Old Testament reading today, we hear the first five verses of the Bible, in Genesis. God through Moses takes us back to the beginning of the entire world, and actually even just before. God pulls back the curtain of what came before history, before creation, before the fall, before the anything existed. When we think of the beginning of everything, I think many of us first think of the Garden of Eden, or of paradise or perfection. But even before *that*, when we find there is God and only God, we actually also find that there is chaos.

“The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep.” (Gen. 1:2). The words in Hebrew there to describe what comes before creation are *tohu wabohu*, a phrase that is difficult to find the exact English equivalent. It means something like “formless void” or “shapeless, unformed, order-less thing.” It’s not evil, in that sense of chaos; there’s no sin yet. But however we decide to translate the Hebrew, the point is clear. Life is impossible at this point; life can’t exist in a void, where there is nothing. For life to take place and for order to reign, the chaos must be broken, and an entirely new thing must take its place.

The next few verses shows us that’s exactly what happens. The “Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters,” and by the Spirit who was present, and by the power of God’s spoken Word, the first command of order and life was sent out into the void, “Let there be light.” And by the mere *sound* of the spoken Word of God, chaos and darkness were broken, and an entirely new thing took its place. Order was introduced. And there was light. And it was “good” (1:3-4).

Of course, it didn’t take long for that order that God created to be corrupted by human sin. Chaos came roaring back in the form of a seductive serpent, a choice to rebel, and a fruit eaten. And the long tragic history of a fallen world is the history we still experience today. Sin abounds. Evil persists. Childbearing is painful and dangerous. Work is hard. Bodies break down. Death is inevitable. In short, chaos reigns, and any semblance of normal life seems impossible.

And Scripture says that even creation groans for and craves something that will break the chaos and restore order (Romans 8:22).

Many people look around at this world and can only see the chaos, and it leads them to wonder, “What, if anything, could possibly fix all this?” We may even find ourselves wondering the same as well. And that’s the intent of the devil. He’s the enemy of order and life itself, and he prowls around, seeking to devour us like a roaring lion (1 Peter 5:8). He would like nothing better than for us to become lost in all the chaos.

But we aren’t simply victims, either. We even bring chaos upon ourselves. The devil and all his demons can’t force us to sin. It’s our own sinful nature, our own choices, that plunges us into the darkness. We keep doing the things we know we ought not to do. The sin we know that will hurt our family or those around us. The sin that we know that will damage our own bodies or souls over time. The sin that no one else knows about, because we think we do such a good job covering it up. We willingly open the door to chaos in our lives, and shut ourselves off from the good order that God brings. And any semblance of normal life is impossible, though we may crave something, anything to break the chaos and restore order, to restore us.

Today we celebrate the Baptism of Our Lord. And that should strike us as significant, though maybe even a little odd. Why would Jesus, the Son of God, need to be baptized like a sinner? But this day is truly a day for celebration. Because it was into a sin-darkened and chaotic world that our Lord came. And the midst all the chaos, when the time was right, Jesus approached the Jordan River, where sinners were going to be baptized by John, and Jesus was going to make it clear that he has come to *restore* order. He has come to stand in our place as sinners, though he himself was sinless, and perfectly do what we could never do. Live as we could not live. Die a sinless death that we could not die. And be made alive again, blameless, in a way that we could not make ourselves alive.

And as he was there in the river, the Spirit was once again hovering over the waters, and He descended upon Jesus like a dove. And the Word of God was once again being sent out into the void, saying to Jesus, “You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased” (Mark 1:9-11). And this beloved Son went out and began the restoring and the re-ordering of a world that so desperately craved it. He broke the reign of chaos, subduing the tragic cycle of sin and death. And something new took its place. The Light of the World brought light into this world once more. And it was *good*. Life was possible again. And order was restored.

And if, today, you know this to be true, but still wonder about your life... if you wonder how it is *you* can feel some semblance of order, because there are times when it seems like anything but... hear what God is saying to you. The creation that was begun in Genesis, and the process of re-creation that was begun by Jesus, these aren’t some disassociated stories that only happened once in history. These now have become *your* story.

That’s what Paul says in Romans 6: “Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized in Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his” (6:3-5).

In other words, the moment you were baptized, the Spirit, who constantly hovers over the Baptismal waters where He promises to work, along with the Word of God that was sent out into the void of your sin-darkened life, breaking the chaos of your sin, and in its place created something entirely new. A new creature, with new life.

At Baptism, God said to you, “You are my beloved child; I have made you mine.” At Baptism, you were joined personally to all that Jesus has done for you. Yes, his death and resurrection happened in history, but through Baptism, they have now happened to you. Death to sin, and new life in Christ. Therefore, the reign of chaos of sin and death *for you* was broken. And the light and life and order that Jesus brings has now been made yours.

And yes, for a time, there will continue to be days that seem more chaotic than ordered. That’s the tension of the Christian life, that we know that the victory’s been won for us by Christ and has been made ours without a shadow of a doubt in our Baptism. At the same time, we await the day of the resurrection when Christ’s victory will be fully revealed.

Until then, we rejoice and find peace knowing that God is present with us in the chaos – that’s the Gospel good news of Christmas. That Christ was willing to step into the chaos to be present with us. But even more, Christ came to break the reign of chaos, which is what he’s done in our lives, subduing the power that sin and death have over us. And he has given us an entirely new thing in its place—new life now, and the promise of eternal life. We look forward to the day when we will experience all things perfectly ordered with him, living in peace and security forever. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

And now may the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus, our Lord.