



Message for the First Sunday after Epiphany
Baptism of Our Lord
January 10, 2021

"The voice of the Lord"

Pastor Kirk Kerns

"And God saw that the light was good"
(Genesis 1:4)

Let us pray: God of splendor, your voice thunders over the waters as you reign above the flood. Give strength to your people who are born anew by water and the Spirit, that we may praise your wonderful deeds and give you the glory due your name; through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen.

Our first reading from Genesis is the beginning of the Biblical story and of creation. "In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth" are the first words in scripture. As good Christians, we know this story of the beginning of creation. But what was there before God began to create? This is my first question for today. The passage states the beginning but a question is what was

going on before this beginning? Cory Driver in his commentary on today's first reading talked about this beginning and was comparing the original language to what was translated and how it maybe should have been translated. Driver stated, "I usually argue for a translation that goes something like: 'When God began to create the heavens and the earth....'" Driver went on to say, "In other words, Genesis 1:1 is not speaking about the absolute beginning of all things, but a beginning of certain things."

So, what was going on before God began to create the heavens and the earth? Well, we know from Genesis chapter one that God created. We read that the earth was a formless void and that darkness covered the face of the deep. A wind from God swept over the face of the waters and then there was the creation of light out of the darkness. So, one could say that there was something tangible before God began God's work of creation. We read that the earth was a strange state of formless non or pre-existence but it still "is" somehow. In the midst of this passage, we hear that what God created was good.

It is hard to imagine what it was like and we have to consider that what we read in Genesis is in fact the beginning of the creation. After we read about the darkness and the formless void, God said, "let there be light; and there was light." Then we read, "And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light

from the darkness.” It was good because God was the one who created the heavens and the earth and all that encompasses it. We are part of that creation and God saw the whole creation as good including humankind.

Now I find myself wanting so much to jump up on my soapbox to scream out about this past year and we all hope that 2021 is a better year. I was working on this message thinking about the formless void that creation came from and then reading the gospel and John the Baptist being in the wilderness. It just seems to be pointing to life in the present in some ways. Then it appeared for us that our democracy was under attack this past Wednesday and it was but the ship was finally righted. Where did this come from? I kept thinking about the formless void and the wilderness in our readings for today and it kept me seeing what was going on as part of some wilderness experience or coming to fruition from a formless void.

God created this planet we live on and everything on it from darkness. God created the light and it was good and now we have to ask ourselves how we go forward into that light away from the darkness of last Wednesday. It seems that the authorities were not expecting that kind of presence of those who stormed the capital. But they did restore order and the work of the legislature did continue. It was a dark blot on our history and one that will remain for some time

to come. I kept asking myself how this could happen in our country just as many others of you were asking the same thing. Thugs stormed the capital and not Americans who respect what law and order is all about even if we disagree on things. It was the darkness that God separated out to give way to the light and we have to always seek out the light and condemn that kind of darkness.

Okay, I am now off of my soapbox for the moment. I move on to the wilderness that John the Baptist appeared in proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. The wilderness seems to be prevalent in the beginning of Mark's gospel. Mark begins his gospel with saying that this is "the beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ the Son of God." Then according to the gospel story Mark quotes the Prophet Isaiah and part of that quote states, "The voice of one crying out in the wilderness: Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight." One crying out in the wilderness is the very one we read about today that "John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness."

Then we have the baptism of Jesus by John in the Jordan River which sheds light on the story. But it is shortly after the baptism that we read that the Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness and Jesus was there forty days being tempted by the devil. Jesus' ministry seems to be on a fast track in Mark the shortest of the gospel stories. After his stay in the wilderness, we read about

Jesus preaching and calling disciples and teaching and healing, and healing and healing. Before the end of the first chapter, we already hear about Jesus' need to retreat from it all. Jesus gets up in the morning while it is still dark, and goes to a deserted place, and there he prayed. Simon and his companions go looking for Jesus and find him and we hear about Jesus preaching and healing again.

Mark begins his gospel with John the Baptist in the wilderness and then Jesus being baptized. I am sure there are times when we all find ourselves feeling like we are in the wilderness. 2020 was not kind to us in many ways and I would be willing to say that most of us felt alone. As I talk to people and to members of the congregation, I find the first thing that seems to be mentioned is that aloneness. We miss each other's company. We miss the normal interactions with one another. I miss all of you. It can be so frustrating at times but we have to continue onward. Just as Jesus continued onward from the deserted places of rest to the ministry he was called to do. You see and you have heard me say on several occasions that life for us does end but the Word of God continues on into eternity.

We have worked to find ways to move out of the darkness that seems to surround us in our recent lives to the light that God has created for each one of us. During the Pastor's Bible study this past week we were talking about the

troubles that 2020 have brought to us. Then one of my colleagues asked us to pause for a moment and remember the good things that have taken place during 2020. We get so tied up with what was wrong that we forget what was right. The darkness surfaces for us and we forget about the light. We have to remember that when God created the light God saw that it was good and so God separated the darkness from the light. No matter how dark things seem to be, there is always the light for us to see and feel and remember.

God created and it was good and you and I are part of that creation and we are part of God's good creation. We find ourselves wandering in the wilderness at times but need to remember that God directs us out of the wilderness to life in the world that God created. Jesus was baptized by John in the Jordan and at his baptism God enters into the world to proclaim, "You are my Son, the Beloved: with you I am well pleased." At our baptisms, God also calls us beloved and that God is pleased.

At the baptism of Jesus, the boundary between heaven and earth was torn wide open. God claims Jesus as his beloved Son and we are not sure in Mark's story whether others could hear God's words. Mark's gospel doesn't really offer us anything more except this truth that starting here and from here on out that

boundary between heaven and earth continues to be torn wide open in Jesus' preaching and healing, teaching and calling us to the light.

We are not Jesus but we are all children of God through our baptisms into Christ Jesus. Each one of us uniquely loved. And yes, God is surely pleased with us as well as we seek to bend ourselves to God's will: yearnings as Jesus was to be hands of healing and hope for a hurting world.

The voice of God in our ears is enough to guide us to the light of Christ and know that the darkness will not overcome the light. "God said let there be light and there was light." When we get all caught up in the troubles of the world as 2020 seemed to be all about, stop and think about the light that was shined on each one of us in 2020 as well. This past Wednesday was a dark mark on our history but in the end the light prevailed and the legislature was able to complete its work. We can never give in to the darkness. Sometimes the wilderness calls us to come and sometimes it is good to have those quiet moments just as Jesus looked for a deserted place to pray. But Jesus never stayed there but kept on moving forward.

May we pause for just a moment and give thanks for the light of this past year and not be overcome by the darkness of it. God created the light and separated it from the darkness for a reason. God comes to us and calls us his

beloved. In the creation, God saw that the light was good and that humankind was good. "In the beginning" or as Cory Driver stated in his commentary, "When God began to create the heavens and the earth" **it was all good**. Thanks be to God. Amen.

Let us pray: Holy God you are the creator of light and the giver of goodness. Help us to remember that your light so shines on us and help us to always see the light in the midst of the darkness we all face. You blessed your Son at his baptism and you bless us at our baptisms too. Show us your way and your light in the midst of the troubles of this world so that we don't forget those blessings given to us. In Jesus name we pray, amen.