

Scripture Readings and Sermon

January 10, 2021 by Rev. Mark Brechin

Commentary on Genesis 1:1-5 (Youtube [Lectionary Study Video](#))

The creation story in the Book of Genesis over the past century has become a source of much debate. The first debate within the Christian community is reconciling the creation story in Genesis 1 with the creation story in Genesis 2 with the garden. Outside of the Christian community, the theory of evolution and the Big Bang have been used to challenge the "myth" of creation in Genesis. For those that find the Bible as a source of strength for their faith, this debate is minimized by the powerful assurance given in this passage. The key to this assurance is the word "wind" which in Hebrew can also mean breath and spirit. The Hebrew word translated as "formless void" can also be translated as chaos. The first two lines of Genesis, using chaos and spirit portray the assurance that in the midst of chaos God's spirit brings order. Whether the chaos is the result of some Big Bang or the everyday chaos of life, this story promises that God's Holy Spirit will bring meaning and order to our lives. While some may still enter into debate, may those with ears hear.

Genesis 1:2 The earth was without form, and void; and darkness was on the face of the deep.

And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters.

What does it mean that God "hovers" over the chaos?

Is it comforting to know that God is near even in the craziness of the world?

Can the Spirit breathe new life into your world today?

Do you feel the Spirit blowing away the chaff and washing you clean?

Commentary on Mark 1:4-11 (Youtube [Lectionary Study Video](#))

A "mikveh" or ritual cleansing was required by the Law in both Leviticus and Numbers before entering the Temple. The use of water for ritual cleansing harkens back to story of Noah and the flood. The unclean were washed from the face of the earth while the clean were saved. Ritual cleansing is not simply about hygiene but is symbolic of a right relationship with God. A cleansing was needed before one could enter the House of God. John expanded the Temple to include all of the promised land. By standing where Joshua crossed the Jordan and performing mikvehs, John was proclaiming that all the people even the priest were unclean and needed to repent. This mikveh of repentance is what the followers of John meant when they responded to Paul concerning baptism. This is also why John said that Jesus did not need a mikveh since he was already the pure Lamb of God. A mikveh, however, was also require before a priest could begin his service to God and so Jesus, our high priest, was "baptized". The Father affirms both Jesus' purity and authority as a priest when the voice proclaimed, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased."

Mark 1:8 I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."

What is the difference between water and the Holy Spirit?

Could the difference be like soap and water versus hydrogen peroxide?

If water removes what is on the outside, what does the Holy Spirit remove?

Are most of us ready for that "deep" cleaning?

What are you still keeping buried deep inside?

Commentary on Acts 19:1-7 (Youtube [Lectionary Study Video](#))

The key to understanding both the passages from Acts and Mark is to further explore the meaning of "baptism". The Greek word "baptizein" means "to dip, soak, immerse". The word was often used when referring to the dyeing process where material was dipped or baptized with a colored

dye. The material would take on the color of what it was dipped into. This would explain why Paul asked if they had received the Holy Spirit. To be baptized into Christ for Paul meant to take on the "dye" of the Holy Spirit. Once they were baptized, they began to manifest gifts of the Spirit like tongues and prophesy. The "baptism" that Jesus and the followers of John received, however, was not rooted in the Greek understanding but rather the Hebrew tradition.

Acts 19:2 "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you became believers?"

Have we allowed the Holy Spirit to dwell in us?

Has the Spirit removed all the clutter in our hearts to make room for God's presence?

Has every aspect of our lives soaked in the Spirit?

Or have we simply dipped in so that on the outside it looks like we are Christians?

Sermon "Calm in Chaos" ([*Sermon Video*](#))

It is said that Thomas Jefferson called his presidential election "the Revolution of 1800" because it marked the first time that power in America passed from one political party to another. At times, this transition has occurred smoothly while in years such as this the transition seems closer to chaos than democracy. Chaos can also come from within. While depression is often referred to as a dark or black period, that does not mean peace or quiet but rather reflects an inner turmoil that sucks life and energy into the abyss. This black hole of chaos can be caused by external event like pandemics and riots or the internal events of stress and health. Following a year of upheavals and frustrations, it would not be surprising for some people to feel that their life and their world is in chaos.

Genesis reminds us that God is over everything including chaos. Over the dark abyss, God's breath, Spirit, brought order and peace. In the midst of the black whole of nothingness, God brought light that could not be consumed or extinguished. Our Creator God brings good even all appears to be chaos and destruction. The Spirit which blew at creation now blows over the life of the believer. Like something covered by leaves and debris, the Spirit blows away all those things which clutter our lives so that God's goodness and blessing can again be found.

While our life sometimes needs just a simply dusting off, there are other times when we need a bath. We need to be washed in the waters of repentance and forgiveness. We need a ritual cleansing, a mikvah/mikveh or baptism in Greek. We need to go to Jordan and remember our baptism. As required of all those entering the priesthood according to Leviticus, Jesus went to John to receive his mikvah. This was not to wash away sin but rather to fulfill the Law according to the Father's will. The miraculous thing is that, just like Jesus, when we turn away (repent) from the chaos and wash in the spirit (remember our baptism) then we too have ears to hear, "You are my beloved child. With you, I am well pleased" (forgiveness). Remembering our baptism, reminds us of whose we are (children of God) and who we are (created good). The darkness and chaos of the world is washed away through the waters of our baptism.

There are times, however, when something needs more than a good wash. The stains are set too deep. They need a good soaking. Baptism in Greek means to soak something so that the dye will set. The Spirit not only blows away the debris of life and washes away the filth of our sin but the Spirit also soaks down to the depths of our soul to the root of our brokenness. To be baptized in the Spirit is to be soaked in the cleansing "oxiclean" blood of the Lamb. Like a refiners fire brings the impurities to the surface, the Spirit brings our deep brokenness up so that our Lord may heal us. This fire and this scrubbing causes many an eager Christian to turn from the path of wholeness. Facing the brokenness and chaos of our own lives can be one of the most painful experiences of our lives. Only by faith can we face the cross of our brokenness and only by faith can we come to see the light over the empty tomb when the chaos has been replaced by God's light. In the light of that first day of our new life, we find life even in the midst of death and calm in chaos.