

Pastor Sally May

Sermon: "Creating Peace" - October 25, 2015

Scripture: Genesis 1:1-10; John 14:27

Scriptures:

Genesis 1:1-10

1In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters.

Then God said, "Let there be light"; and there was light. And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness. God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day.

And God said, "Let there be a dome in the midst of the waters, and let it separate the waters from the waters." So God made the dome and separated the waters that were under the dome from the waters that were above the dome. And it was so. God called the dome Sky.

And there was evening and there was morning, the second day.

And God said, "Let the waters under the sky be gathered together into one place, and let the dry land appear." And it was so. God called the dry land Earth, and the waters that were gathered together he called Seas. And God saw that it was good.

John 14:27

Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid.

Sermon: CREATING PEACE

The Genesis text has been swirling in my head for at least the last two months. And John's text is more recent, within the last 3-4 weeks.

I've been asking myself how these two texts connect, what truth is in them that I need to recognize, to understand, to relate with and to? What about them together is greater than either one alone?

I have already shared with some of you that the Genesis text offers to me a truth of the natural existence of chaos as a part of life.

In these first 2 1/2 days of what we understand to be one of the Creation stories shared by Michael/Janet, God is not creating something out of nothing. There was darkness, wind, earth, and deep waters. God added light. And then God took what was already there, what already existed; the darkness, the water, the air, the land and the sky – and separated them. God separated the light from darkness, the waters of the sky; rain and snow, sleet and hail, from the waters of the land. God separated the waters of seas, lakes, and rivers from the soil ~ separating the waters from the land.

What God created was order out of chaos. From that creating order the seeds in the earth, of the soil, were able to grow and reproduce. Verse 11 reads “Then God said, ‘Let the earth put forth vegetation: plants yielding seed, and fruit trees of every kind on earth that bear fruit with the seed in it.’ And it was so.”

Once God had separated day and night, creatures were able to leave the waters, with birds flying in the air, and animals of all kinds crawling on the ground. “God said, ‘Let the waters bring forth swarms of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the dome of the sky.’” (verse 20) “And God said, ‘Let the earth bring forth living creatures of every kind: cattle and creeping things and wild animals of the earth of every kind.’ And it was so.” (verse 24)

Now, you may be thinking that the Bible does say that God created these things, and you would be correct in that scripture does say that in the verses in between what I share this morning. Yet, in deconstructing and isolating text in an effort to understand, scripture first offers that God did not create them out of nothing rather God created order out of the chaos so that life could break forth and be fruitful and multiply. God creates by offering God’s presence in the chaos and then creating order, shaping that which sustains life in ways that offer new life. With regard to humanity, there is no confusion. It simply says God created humankind. “So God created humankind in God’s image, in the image of God. God created them; male and female God created them.” (verse 27)

Now for those who have been involved with this church over the past weeks and months, I think it is fair and right and honest to lift up the truth that some, many of us have perceived, felt, seen, experienced chaos. I know I have. As well, I would be hard pressed to believe that there is a person in this sacred space who has not experienced or witnessed chaos. So may I ask: How is the chaos that happens in

our individual lives or in community connected with this first creation story in the Bible?

The connection for me is because of something my Old Testament professor shared in one of the very first classes of my seminary experience. He described the Bible as a story, a compilation of stories that become one story, and that story is what it is to be a human being in a world that was created.

In other words, the Bible offers written evidence, witness of ancient peoples struggling with who they were, what their place in the world was, who was God, what was God, and what was their relationship with the earth, their God, and fellow human beings. What does it mean to be a created being living in the midst of other forms of life; of plants and animals, other human beings, and with God? The Priestly authors of this creation story were struggling with wanting and needing order in the midst of chaos. This text offers that life is not perfect, easy, or simple. In creation, and in creating, in being human and living in a world that continues to be created, chaos is a necessary element of our living, individually and collectively. Chaos is messy and uncertain, and we human beings seem to innately want a sense of order and knowing.

When we are frozen by the chaos, or flee from situations of chaos in our lives because it confuses us, overwhelms us, scares us, and/or creates paralyzing anxiety we fail to live into our God-given potential; beings created in God's image, to create order out of the chaos, to recognize the potential, the possibility of new life, of new ways of living. To do otherwise, though, can be, is terrifying, seemingly impossible, and dangerous to our bodies, minds, and souls.

What scripture offers is that God calls us to be challenged, to accept and embrace that chaos is not something to run away from, ignore, or deny. Rather, chaos is an opportunity to offer and provide new space and place for life to come forth, to grow, and to multiply. Chaos holds the seeds of creation, of life and living, in the depths of darkness where it cannot be seen, heard, touched, or tasted. It is our task to offer light that reveals that which is hidden in the darkness.

This text offers to me a call – a call that will not let me avoid chaos, to avoid what is messy and uncertain, and therefore scary. Instead, it is a call to enter into the chaos of my life and the lives of the people and communities and world I love and care so much about.

And it is here where I begin to see the connection between Genesis and the Gospel of John in today's readings.

I share again John 14:27: Jesus says to his disciples”

“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid.”

This verse is in the midst of what is known as “the farewell discourse”~ the time when Jesus tries to explain the significance of his death and to begin to prepare the disciples for life without him on earth as a physical presence. This verse is after Jesus has told his disciples to continue to believe in him, to keep his commandments, and that after he leaves, an Advocate, the Holy Spirit, will be with them. I can only imagine the confusion, the fear, the disbelief – the sense of chaos felt by the disciples in what Jesus is saying is going to happen.

I am also reminded of the Gospel of John text that describes a room with a locked door where fearful disciples had hidden after Jesus's death. The previous days of Jesus' arrest, torture and crucifixion must have been filled with chaos. In this room of fear and allegiance Jesus appears to them and says “Peace be with you.” In both scenes, before and after Jesus's death, in both experiences of chaos in the lives of the disciples Jesus offers his peace.

Now I don't know about you, but if I am afraid, anxious, confused because my life or the life of a beloved community or the world is in chaos and I don't know what to do or how to respond, the last thing I probably want someone to say is “Peace.” My initial reaction would more likely be – what do you mean peace? – Life is crazy, I can't handle it, and I have to work harder and longer to control the chaos around me. There is no peace and I do not have the time or patience for peace, and it seems counter-intuitive - to be calm, to rest, to not worry in the midst of something I do not understand and/or cannot control. And thus why I was a bit confused when this text started resonating in my head a couple of weeks ago.

So I started learning more about what Jesus is really offering. What is the Peace of Jesus anyway? What I learned now offers sense and fits beautifully in offering ways in which to not try to deny or control or eliminate chaos, but to live into it, embracing it and understanding chaos as a mechanism, an opportunity for and a way to new life.

The peace that Jesus offers in John 14:27 is the first time he offers it in in the Gospel of John.¹ It is through an Advocate, by way of the Holy Spirit that the peace of Jesus is available to all. It is not a peace of this world; the peace of harmony, absence of fighting, or even personal calm. It is a deep, faith-filled peace that invites a peace many have never known. And when it is experienced it is a feeling and a way of being and living like no other. In the Book of Acts we read that after the Holy Spirit descended on the disciples Peter was not only no longer afraid, he became the #1 evangelist – bringer of Good News. Rather than denying Jesus he stood in the streets of Jerusalem proclaiming that Jesus lives on. He was repeatedly arrested as he shared the Good News with anyone who would listen – as did so many of our ancestors in faith, both men and women. They gave up their possessions, they were ridiculed, they suffered imprisonment and even tortuous deaths.

Jesus' peace is not a peace that offers false security and thus complacency in the midst of chaos. Jesus is not telling the disciples to not worry. Jesus is telling the disciples that in accepting the peace offered through him via the Holy Spirit they will gain strength and perseverance to carry on. They will be granted the ability and desire to create order out of the chaos, to invite others to believe that which is unbelievable, to reveal the resurrected Jesus, the living Christ, to others.

And look what happened.

The Peace of Jesus is powerful indeed. It has been, it is, and it will always be available to each and every one of us through faith in the power and the presence of the Holy Spirit.

¹ Gail R. O'Day, "The Gospel of John: Introduction, Commentary, and Reflections," in *Luke;John*, volume IX, New Interpreter's Bible, Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995, p 751.

As my professor so wisely shared – The Bible is a story – and it is so much more – it is a compilation of stories – stories of chaos, of creating order out of chaos, over and over and over again - and of the possibility and promise that the Love of God, the Peace of Christ and the Power of the Holy Spirit can and will transcend all that is scary and threatening and not right with the world - inviting intimacy to each and every one of us so that we may have life and live it abundantly. Every story is an offering as is THE story that is the Bible. The stories of the Bible, that which is the Bible is an invitation, a desire, a call – for you, for me, for us - this community of Christian faith - to create a beloved community.

Let us pray.

May the Love of God embrace and encourage each and all of us to willingly enter into the chaos of our lives as we now accept chaos as both inevitable and as an offering of promise for new ways of being, of living, of creating, that we may swim like fish, fly like birds, and offer life abundantly.

May the Peace of Jesus give us the strength, the courage, the perseverance to do God's work of creating order out of chaos, an offering of new life and abundant life for one and for all, yielding seeds and bearing fruit of faith, hope and love.

May the presence and the power of the Holy Spirit make it real and make it happen. Amen.