

God Created - Catch a Glimpse

January 10, 2021

Genesis 1: 1-5

¹ In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, ² 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. ³ Then God said, "Let there be light"; and there was light. ⁴ And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness. ⁵ God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day.

Mark 1: 4 and 7-11

⁴ John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins... ⁷ He proclaimed, "The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the thong of his sandals. ⁸ I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."

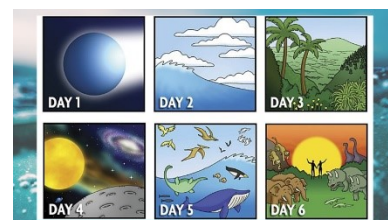
⁹ In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. ¹⁰ And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. ¹¹ And a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased."



Welcome to our new worship series, "Created Anew"! During this series we will celebrate both God's creativity and our own in this season of new beginnings.

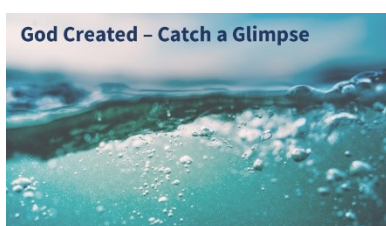
As a community of faith, we will explore what it means to be a follower of Jesus. As individuals, we will seek to see our Christian identity in a new and fresh way. This morning, as we begin this series, let us begin with a word of prayer...

We start this morning with the beginning of the creation story. Turn with me to the origins of our story, to Genesis 1. As the passage begins, we learn that the earth was a *"formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep"*. A wind from God swept out over the waters and then God's voice said, *"Let there be light"*. God saw that the light was good and separated the light from the dark, creating day and night. Although our passage ends here this morning, we know that there are five more days of God's creativity followed by a day of rest, the Sabbath. In the following days God creates the sun, moon, stars, sky, land, seas, plants, animals, fish, birds, and humankind. God also creates all the systems and laws of nature that keep this all going. To create something out of nothing is amazing and wonderful. To create such diversity and complexity from absolutely nothing fascinates me, and it also humbles me. God is so amazing, so much bigger than we can even begin to imagine.



As you and I are made in God's image, we are naturally creative as well. While our level of creativity does not match God's, you and I can be thoughtful and creative and inventive. When are you are your creative best? Is it when your mind is at rest and free from worries and distractions? Or... are you most creative when you are in the thick of things and necessity drives creativity? Or, like some I know, are you at your creative best after that first cup of coffee?

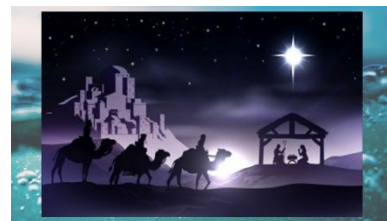
However it is that our creativity comes to us most naturally, we are usually most creative when we encounter or experience situations that do not have concrete or limited outcomes. It is when we have to step outside the box that we begin to ask those “what if” questions. It is in the liminal spaces, in those thin spaces, in those in-between spaces, that we see things in a new light and often in a new way.



We are currently living in an in-between space in several ways. First, we are in-between what was and what will be. Due to these COVID times, things are not what they

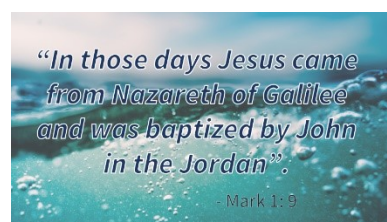
once were. But the longer that we have walked through these times, the more we have come to realize that things will never be exactly the same. That makes this new year unique. The turning of the calendar is always an opportunity to be creative, to think about ourselves and about our lives, to consider what we want to be different, better, new. In that sense our blank canvas that represents 2021 is like that “*formless void*” that was before God at the beginning of time. God imagined what could be and created something better, something new. In the Genesis story, all that God created was done for one purpose: to make a world in which we could live and breath and move in connection with God. So as we think about our blank canvas of 2021, it is my hope and prayer that part of what we imagine, that part of what we create, that part of what we hope for centers on living in a deeper and more intimate relationship with the God who created all of this – all of this world – to be with you and with me.

Turning to Mark 1 we connect into another of God's wonderfully creative and imaginative moments. When the time was just right – in another of those thin, liminal, in-between spaces – God entered the world as a baby. The world that God had created as a place to be in connection with us was in the thick of things. The time had come to once again be creative, to imagine "what if". The God spoke the prophecies into being came to live among us, to be a part of our world and lives, to do something that had never been done before, to reveal himself in a new and creative way. God was so creative in wanting to know our experiences and our joys and struggles, in wanting to understand how we live, in wanting to feel what we felt, that God came in the form of a human being. In that human form, God painted a new picture of what his love looked like when lived out through the life and teachings of Jesus. God delighted in entering our world to dwell among us. In a similar way, in the birth of a child, we too delight in new life. As we welcome a child into the world, we experience a glimpse of the delight that God feels when one of his creations – one of us – commits to a lifelong relationship with Jesus Christ.



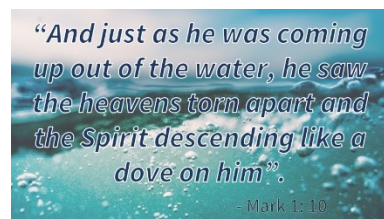
At the beginning of December, on the second Sunday in Advent, we also read from the opening story of Mark's gospel. We recall that Mark was out there in the wilderness offering a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. We also recall that John was the one who came to prepare the way, to make straight paths for the Lord. In verse nine we read these words:

"In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan".



As a way to formally begin his ministry, Jesus chose to be baptized by John. From here we also recall that Jesus heads into the wilderness to face a trial of his own as he was tempted by Satan. Let's think about this for a moment. The one who was without sin came to John to receive a baptism of repentance. The one who was tempted but never gave in to sin came to be baptized by John. If Jesus did not "need" to be baptized, then why did he come to John? There are several reasons. First, Jesus came to show us the way. By submitting to baptism, Jesus was demonstrating that it is a step that we should take too. Second, Jesus was physically taking his place with the rest of sinful Israel, a means of accepting his role to shepherd and minister to these people. This too is something we do as we live out the command to be ministers to the world. Third, his baptism signals that Jesus is ready to take his place as a prophet of God, as one committed to giving his life for the redemption of God's children.

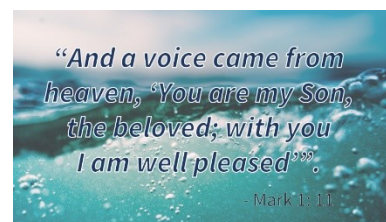
Jesus' baptism becomes one of those liminal, transitional moments. In verse nine we read about the ongoing creativity of God. We understand that in his baptism Jesus more fully became one of us. In participating in this sacred act, Jesus was participating in the life of his people. In his baptism we also begin to understand that the story will continue after Jesus leaves the earth. The baptism of water that John offers will become a new baptism that God offers. Verse ten reveals this. Here we read, *"And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him"*. Through Jesus, God will offer a new baptism.



It will not be a baptism of water but of the Spirit. Just as God designed the ecosystems and laws of nature to perpetuate the functioning of the earth, God designed our relationship with him to be perpetual and ongoing.

If step one for God was to create the world as a space to be in connection with us and if step two for God was to come and dwell among us in the person of Jesus, defining what that connection looked like when lived out to the full, then step three for God was to create a way to always be with us. Our first step into that everlasting relationship is baptism. Through baptism we take our initial step in pursuing a forever relationship with God. Baptism is also where God's pursuit of us begins. It is through our baptism that we begin to feel the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit and that we begin to experience his grace.

In the moment immediately after Jesus' baptism, an affirmation was given. *"And a voice came from heaven, 'You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased'".* These words of God towards his Son are the same words that God



speaks over you and over me. We too are the beloved children of God. When we are baptized, we are marked with the seal of the Holy Spirit. This is a step that God makes towards us. The seal is the promise of our place in the family of God. Made a son or daughter of God, we are being made ready to one day enter into a saving relationship with God. As we enter into our saving relationship with the Lord, we are created anew – born again. In this rebirth, God again delights in us.

Just as we experience delight in a new birth, just as we have moments when we just smile upon our children, so too does God smile down upon us as he catches a glimpse of us living out our faith as we strive to be the light shining in the darkness. In those moments, God also says, *"with you I am well pleased"*.



There is also another similarity that we find in our relationship with our children and in our relationship with God. As parents, when we find our children in trouble, we would certainly take the blow, serve the sentence, suffer the consequence, or stand in the place of our child in order to spare them pain or to save them from evil. That is what God in the flesh did as Jesus took up our place on the cross. Out of love, God took the blow, served the sentence, suffered the consequences, and stood in our place. In Christ, God spared us the pain; he saved us from evil.

When I think about the creation story and the story of what Christ did for you and for me and for all of creation, reconciling us to God, forgiving our sins, paying the price for those sins, dying and rising, I am both amazed and humbled. Not only did God create and create anew, but God continues to want to be a part of creation, beside and in and through you and me. We do catch a glimpse of what God's love is for us through our relationship with our children.

I close this morning with a few thoughts for you to consider. In God's grand story, do you catch a glimpse of your place in his family? In the incarnation of Jesus, do you catch a glimpse of the depth of his love for you? Knowing your place and the knowing the depth of God's love for you, can you catch a glimpse of who and what God created you to be as a part of his family? Please join me next Sunday as we continue to explore this journey of faith as we delve into the freedom we find as we live as brothers and sisters of the king. Let us pray...

GPS – Grow, Pray, Study

- 1) *Grow*. As we move through this series, how do you seek to grow deeper in your relationship with God? Through study? Worship? Prayer? Fasting?
- 2) *Pray*. Do you find yourself (or know of a friend) in a liminal space, in an in-between moment? Pray for guidance and discernment.
- 3) *Study*. Read Mark 1: 12-13 and Matthew 4: 1-11. Why is there such a difference in these accounts? When you are tempted or when you sin, do you see your situation more like Matthew or like Mark? Why?