

Genesis 1:1-5

In 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.

Mark 1:4-11

John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. And people from the whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem were going out to him, and were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. Now John was clothed in camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locust and wild honey. 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. I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.

In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. 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. And a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased."

Sermon

There was an interesting segment I heard lately that talked about the challenges of fully relying on GPS for navigation in international waters. The conversation talked about the risk that came, especially in and around certain nations, because GPS was something that could easily be jammed, causing the navigation to go out. The expert who was sharing the problem indicated that shipping companies and national governments were working on solutions, but maybe the simplest solution was that the Naval Academy was putting astronavigation back into the curriculum.

For many millennia, humans have relied on the night sky to be a way of navigating both on land and water. The lights in the dark sky became road maps that, if you knew how to read them, could take you anywhere. And so it was for wisemen who arrived in Jerusalem and then in Bethlehem, following the star and finding what they were seeking, a child that would be king.

Over time, we learned from the stars that we too could help guide those traveling in the night. We built watchtowers that would have a fire in them and lighthouses that would send out a beam to show boats both the dangers and the way home. Light in the darkness, light in heaven and light of man.

And in the beginning God said, "Let there be light" and there was light. But even before there was light, there was a wind from God that swept over the face of the waters. It is here in the first few verses of Genesis, in the beginning of the beginning that we are first introduced to God's 'rauch', God's wind, God's spirit that moves across the cosmic waters of chaos. And out of the chaos then God creates order, light, purpose.

And for Mark's Gospel, we again need to begin the story with God's 'rauch', God's wind or spirit moving across the waters, bringing order, light, purpose. In Genesis it is God's word that creates the light, creation is spoken into being and pronounced good. In Mark's Gospel, the Messiah too is spoken into being, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased."

Baptism and creation, Spirit and declaration, chaos to order, light in the darkness - each intertwined and each bringing forth both warning and a way home.

And here we are, not at the beginning of creation nor the beginning of our own life or ministry, but still here we are.

Here we are, not on January 1st or any other significant day that calls forth a new beginning. But still, here we are. Darkness still holds sway in this season and for some of us, we could really use some light in our lives. We are looking for direction, looking for purpose, looking for meanings, looking for some way to get past or around or through challenges and heartaches and stumbling blocks and brokenness. We are looking for order in the midst of our chaos, we are looking for light that can show us the way home.

And so we wait and watch, and we pray that we may have the skills necessary to read the stars or to see the light.

And the spirit rushes across the waters, the Spirit descends like a dove. And God will speak.

In our baptism we remember that God has already spoken, through the voice of a man who lived 2 thousand years ago, and through the voices of prophets before and after. In our baptism we remember that God's spirit has already come, in the moment of creation and every new creation since, God's spirit has descended like a dove and rushed across the waters. In our baptism we remember that God's spirit and word is a beginning, a beginning in our faith and in our understanding of purpose and what home truly is, a journey that will eventually be complete when we find our final home - our permanent place where we are welcomed, accepted - where we belong. In our baptism we are reminded that we are good - we are beloved - and that we are called forth by the spirit and by God's own declaration to go forth and serve and live as lighthouses that work to augment the light of the heavens - to become beacons that help others navigate the perils and to also find a home where they are welcomed and accepted - where they belong.

Some today do not remember the day they were baptized, but they know the story, the date, that it has happened. Others remember that day, the feeling of the waters on the head, of the words and prayers and embraces of family. And still others are yet to be baptized, yet I still believe that the spirit of God descends and hovers over each of you as well, calling and hoping and preparing all of us for a deeper purpose and a wonderful acceptance and welcome. Today, the waters of baptism are again stirred by the Spirit and God speaks creation into the world. And it is good - and you are beloved. Thanks be to God. Amen