

From Places of Chaos

Grace and peace to you from our Lord Jesus Christ...

At the very beginning of our Scriptures – in the Book of Genesis (the first book of the Bible – and in the 1st five verses) – we are told that before there was light there was darkness... before there was form there was void... before there was hope there was confusion... and before there was the goodness of life (and well-being – and community) it tells us - there was chaos...

This week – as I watched the events taking place in Washington D. C. – I couldn't help but think about that reading from the Book of Genesis (that when God is absent not only in the world that we live in – but when God is absent in the hearts of God's people – how chaos always returns)... how the lights begin to dim - and how hope begins to fade...

I don't need to tell you this (because you're well aware) but our nation finds itself in such a vulnerable place right now... people are more divided than ever – the fingers of blame are pointed at each other – the wounds of our troubled past have resurfaced and have come to haunt us – trust in each other and in our elected leaders, our institutions, and the vision of our future has been greatly bruised – our freedoms and our democracy are in peril and at risk - and like we read in the Book of Genesis (chaos has returned to the world that we know)...

And one might ask – where is our hope?...

This was the same question that the people who went out to see John the Baptist in the Wilderness (the ones we read about in our lesson this morning from Mark's Gospel) were also asking themselves on that day... they were asking – where is our hope in this world?...

And they asked that question while the Romans were occupying the land that God had given to them... they were asking that question when the Temple that God had blessed them with was being occupied by false teachers, pompous and self-righteous religious leaders (who had gone astray)... and they were asking that question in the midst of chaos, confusion, and a crisis of their own... from where will our hope be found? - They wondered at the edge of the Jordan River (just as people are wondering *today*)...

Now let me just switch gears for a moment (and mention that the Baptism of our Lord – which we celebrate every year on the first Sunday of the Epiphany - raises

some questions of its own)... specifically, the main question that has puzzled theologians (and students of the Bible alike) is *why would Jesus need to be baptized if he lived without sin?...*

And since we can only guess - some have surmised that his baptism was simply meant to reveal our Lord's true identity (that he is God's only begotten Son - made known to us in the flesh - an image of God becoming *like one of us*)...

Others have suggested that his baptism was not meant to redeem himself of sin, but like his crucifixion, it was meant to redeem the world...

And still others have mentioned that it was at his baptism that Jesus was awakened to his 'messianic consciousness' that then led him to begin his ministry (which most people believe started when he was about 30 years old)...

But what we can all agree on is that Jesus came to be baptized *in accordance with the will of God the Father...*

+ with love for all humanity (even those we disagree with or dislike)

And with a familiar echo (to our reading in Genesis, Chapter 1) - we see God's presence once again hovering over the waters (and speaking a new hope into the world as He claims His only Begotten Son who was given all power to redeem the world of sin)... bringing the Light of God (to where there was darkness)... life where there was death... and peace where there was chaos...

And it tells us in verse 10, "*Just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending on him like a dove*"...

It's quite a contrast in its imagery - the violence of the Heavens being torn apart (that many believe foreshadows our Lord's crucifixion where the power of death is shattered) - (contrasted with the peaceful image of the Holy Spirit coming down in the form of a dove) - imagery that reminds us of the dove that returned to Noah's Ark with the promise of a new beginning and a new path that leads to peace.

(so that there's no barrier between us & God)
reconciliation

(a path fueled by love that confronts the chaos of this world - and the chaos that rages within each one of us) - not with more war, or division, or retaliation for the wrongs of this world - but with love expressed in the sacrifice made for others... always with God's love... a love that is our hope... and a hope for our broken world (especially today)...

This is why St. Paul encourages us (when the chaos of this world threatens - like it threatens so many today) to look to Jesus' baptism (and the life that he lived) so

that we, too, might know the way to overcome the darkness that threatens us today... *and that is with the power of God's love directing*

In fact, listen to what Paul says in Philippians 2:6...

our steps

He says, *"In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus:*

- ⁶ Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage;*
- ⁷ rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.*
- ⁸ And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross!"*

So what does that have to do with finding hope in this world today?...

Well, Jesus taught us that the only way to overcome the chaos of this world (and to end the suffering – and overcome the darkness that engulfs us – and to bridge the growing divisions among us – especially in our nation today) is not by winning political debates or hating the people on the ‘other side’ – it’s not by winning arguments on Facebook – or by participating in the ‘cancel culture’ (that shuts out all opposing views)... and it’s certainly not found in demanding our own way (or pushing ourselves to the front of the line)... because this will only breed more evil and division...

but our hope can only be found when we embrace God’s love in that we do... and when we pray for God’s love in all that we do... and we share God’s love in all that we do... and we strive for God’s love in all that we do... and when we show God’s love (even to the people who we disagree with) the Spirit of God rests within us...

And is it an easy path that leads us to the cross (of self-denial and obedience to the will of God)?... of course not – but (as our Lord and Savior has shown us with his own life) it’s a path that can restore community and bring people together, bring an end to the chaos that threatens to swallow all of us (in a time when we should be supporting one another), and it can certainly lead us to become more Christ-like (in a world that needs to find healing – now more than ever)...

love (according to the One who loves us) is the only way... and love is the only hope for our nation (and all the nations of the world) to find peace once again (and to find the healing that we all need)...

Friends, I know like you do that the days ahead are going to be difficult (and if we're not careful to pray – and not careful to keep our eyes focused on the cross) we can very quickly find ourselves returning to places of chaos – both in the world that we live in (and more importantly, within ourselves)... because a world without God is a world that's filled with chaos...

And so, rather than close with a story I want to leave you with a mantra (that you are familiar with) and I have been repeating to myself ever since Wednesday afternoon - every time I start feeling hopeless about our nation and the world... and it's a mantra where each one of us has the greatest chance of seeing God's love overcome the darkness that pervades our present day... and that is, "Let there be peace on earth – and let it begin with me"...

May we be blessed to be called 'peacemakers' in these darkened days... may we find strength to follow Jesus to the cross when the chaos ensues... and may we always remember that love – God's love - (is our only hope)...

In Jesus' name we pray...

Amen!