

***First Sunday after Epiphany***

***January 11, 2009***

***Text: Genesis 1:1-5***

***The Reverend David B. Hodges***

The chaos continues. The current conflict between Israel and the Islamic group called Hamas, who currently have control of the Palestinian government in the Gaza Strip, is and has been chaotic for some time. The seemingly never-ending violence between the Israelis and Palestinians erupted again late last month when the Israeli military began another series of air and ground attacks in retaliation against Hamas, who regularly lob missiles across the border into Israel. In this latest episode of war, hundreds of people have been killed so far, including many children and other innocent victims in that part of the world where chaos and disorder seem to be, more often than not, a way of life.

It has been reported that the leaders of Hamas have said they “will continue the resistance until the last drop of blood” (*The Huffington Post*). At the same time, the government of Israel has rejected a United Nations resolution calling for a cease fire, and their tanks and planes continue to pound the Gaza Strip as the chaos continues.

*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 (Genesis 1:1-5).*

These words are the very first ones in the Bible, found in the book of Genesis and they begin to tell us the story of God. They tell us something about who God is and about how God does things, and they begin to describe what will be fleshed out in word after word through the history and the stories of the Bible about the awesome love and faithfulness of God. These words begin to tell us about the Holy One that we as Christians refer to as God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. These words that were written about how God began the act of creation tell us about God the Creator, and they will go on to describe God who is our Redeemer and God who is our Sustainer.

But these beautiful words of poetry that have been debated and studied and criticized speak directly to that part of God's nature that is comforting and assuring, but at the same time can be hard to understand. What the first part of this creation story tells us is that something came out of nothing. Over the chaos of what is described as being nothing but a "formless and

dark void” of water, the breath of God brought that which will go on to be the Earth. When God spoke nothing became something, and that something leads directly to life.

If this was it, and if nothing more than a few more lines of nice poetry followed, then what would we have? Not much. But as we know there is a lot more. What we hear in these first words of the Genesis demonstrates to us what we continue to see over and over again throughout the Bible as being the awesome power of God to make things happen. Time and time again through the things God does, through the many ways that God acts and intervenes in the lives of people who were just like you and me, we see the awesome power of God. Time and time again we read about how God chooses to do certain things that reveal more and more about the ways of God -- many of which are difficult for us to comprehend. Time and time again we find out more about the faithfulness of God that culminates then in the coming of his Son, Jesus Christ into the world.

Now the tough part to understand is this: If God can create something out of nothing, bringing life and order to the chaos of a dark and formless void, then why does the chaos continue? Why is there constant chaos between Israel and Palestine and in other parts of the

Middle East and Africa, in other parts of the world and often in our own lives? Why doesn't God just breathe and restore order?

I like what Walter Bruggemann, who is an Old Testament scholar and writer has to say about it.

***God and his creation are bound together by the powerful, gracious movement of God towards that creation. The binding which is established by God is inscrutable. It will not be explained or analyzed. It can only be affirmed and confessed. This text (the one that we are reading today from Genesis) announces the deepest mystery: God wills and will have a faithful relation with earth... (Walter Brueggemann, Genesis)***

As we know, the next few verses of this text go on to tell us that during a period of a week God continued to act and to bring life into what had been nothing. As a result of all this creation, human beings were made by God in the image of God and to us God gave the authority to rule over all of the other living creatures. What began as nothing more than chaos becomes the life that you and I are living.

In that wonderful and sacred act of creation, God grants to us the gift of free will to make decisions and to live our lives making choices about how we will respond to that love that never stops coming at us. Unfortunately, because we aren't God and because we don't always

love others or ourselves as we should, and because of the ever present reality of sin and evil brought on because of the bad choices we make, the chaos continues. But even so the ultimate message of the Bible is that in the end, because of -- and through -- the death and resurrection of Christ, all things will be restored to order under God. Along the way there have been and will continue to be outward and visible signs of the many ways that God is doing that which God has done from the beginning.

The year 1968 was a difficult one for this country. It was a year of political and social unrest and change. The Vietnam War had escalated and people watched with horror as police and anti-war demonstrators battled in the streets. It was the year that two significant leaders, Martin Luther King, Jr, and Robert F. Kennedy were assassinated. It was the year when two African American athletes bowed their head and raised their fists to protest racism after winning medals in the Olympic Games.

In December of that year, three astronauts traveled for the first time to a place that no one had been before. "We were flying to the moon for the first time," said Commander Jim Lovell, who was one of the three who circled the moon 10 times during the voyage of Apollo 8 that took

place from December 21-27. The trip itself was historic and a monumental event in the exploration of outer space but it turned out to be about a lot more than that.

On Christmas Eve, as Lovell, Frank Borman and William Anders circled the moon in their tiny spacecraft, they did a live television broadcast, which at the time was the largest that had ever occurred. As it began, they showed pictures of the Earth and the Moon, and then what followed has been described as being one of the most inspirational moments in history: the crew began to take turns reading from the first chapter of Genesis. Commander William Anders was first. *For all the people on Earth the crew of Apollo 8 has a message we would like to send you.*

*In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.  
And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters. And God said, Let there be light: and there was light. And God saw the light, that it was good: and God divided the light from the darkness.*

Then Jim Lovell continued:

*And God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And the evening and the morning were the first day.*

The timing could not have been better, and the psychological boost that reading and those pictures of creation gave to people all over the world, and particularly to Americans, was huge.

The chaos continues and it will continue until that time when once again God brings all things to order. But until then of this we can be assured. Over all that seems to so chaotic and without order our loving and life giving God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, is hovering and is always at work breathing the breath of life just as it was in the beginning.