

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.

Chaos. No order, no purpose, no control. Chaos.

I remember a classroom – a dozen young people in the room and I trying to communicate but every one of the dozen is off in a different direction. This one talking about school today, that one tearing the edges of the paper I have handed out, another whose mind is a million miles away. Chaos.

Sometimes it is like that within. My mind races in three or four directions at once. I am heading to the kitchen to find something but when I get there I my mind has jumped to something else and I can no longer remember what I intended to get. I ask a question but leap to other thoughts and never even hear the answer. I resolve not to lose my temper or not to eat so much at the next meal or to take time for prayer and find that days and weeks or months slip by before I even realize that I have not kept my resolve.

Chaos – the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep.

A swirling, churning, boiling liquid, no light – no life until God spoke.

Let there be light.

Instantly there was more than darkness – light burst into being at God's command – through God's Word.

God spoke and the chaos was contained – like it is in the classroom most of the time. One speaks – others listen – there is learning. But always the chaos is trying to spring a leak in the dikes that hold it back. A moment of boredom and in the classroom in an instant disorder can reappear. In creation all is solid, sure, but suddenly the earth is quaking, breaking open, spewing forth molten lava. Out of boiling clouds snakes down a finger of destruction uprooting trees, exploding houses, tossing people and cars in every direction. A spark in the forest ignites a consuming inferno turning all living things to ashes.

In your life and mine a moment's inattention at the wheel and hopes and plans and dreams are crushed in the screech of tires and twisted metal.

A single cell within you is altered and grows silently, undetected. It divides and divides again and in time threatens life.

One harsh word. Then another. And another and another. Until people who promised to be faithful are practicing unfaithfulness in their words and in their deeds. And a marriage dissolves into chaos.

Jesus came to the river Jordan to be baptized by John. He went down under the waters – just as he was coming up out of the water the heavens burst open and the voice from heaven declared, “You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.”

I want you to think about Jesus baptism in a new way today. Do not think of Jesus baptism and forgiveness, or washing. But think of his baptism as going down under the waters of chaos. And the Father in heaven calling him forth out of those waters.

This is the picture of Jesus whole life – entering into the chaos that our sins creates – the chaos that breaks into the order of creation – the chaos that threatens life. Jesus will be stilling storms and walking on the chaotic waters – he will be making whole lives that have been broken – finally Jesus will himself enter the chaos of death. In every moment he will speak the word to restrain the storms, to drive out the demons, until the Father will speak the word that will bring Jesus out of death and into life.

A word. God's word.

What might a person hope for who brings a child to baptism? For safety, security, for light? I hope for all whom I baptize that they will never be thrust into the swirling waters of accident or storm or disease – that they will never be overwhelmed by sadness or loss or failure. I hope for them that baptism will be like a charm warding off all evil and harm. But Jesus' baptism makes me think that God is doing something very different from that.

Baptism is more like the promise that every time chaos breaks through and overwhelms that God will call forth new life. The one whose dreams are crushed in an accident is given new dreams. The marriage in which love has died can be given a new beginning. Your sins that threaten to squeeze all goodness out of life can be forgiven.

How could it be? New life comes into being through God's word and your trust in that word.

Creation happens again through God's word. As God called forth light in that first darkness - in every darkness you encounter God's word is able once again to call forth light. Baptism is God's promise that God will not leave you under the waters – will not abandon you to chaos. God will call you forth – a new creation.

Jesus spoke of his dying on the cross as a baptism. Chaos would burst into all of his world. Friends would flee, enemies would triumph – the sun would not even shine as darkness was over the whole land. After all of Jesus' teaching and healing and trusting everything in his life came down to darkness and death and the cry, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" But on the third day the Father declared not only to Jesus but to all people for all time, "This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased." God raised Jesus from the dead.

Will baptism protect you from chaos? Certainly not. But the God who broke open the heavens will call forth light and raise you out of chaos. Again and again God will do it until finally beyond death you will hear the voice that declares, "You are my child, my beloved, with you I am well pleased."