

Epiphany 1B January 10 2021  
Genesis 1:1-5 and Mark 1:4-11  
St Peter's Lutheran Church Elizabeth  
Greg Bensted

Grace and peace to you Beloved children of God, from Father, Jesus, and Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

*In the beginning when God created... God saw that everything was very good. When Jesus was baptised, a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased."* Let's pray:

Have you ever had days where regret has taken hold of you and you wished you could do a complete make-over? Days when you wanted to push the reset button and start again? How many times have you regretted doing something and wished you could go back and do things differently? Who wouldn't rewind 2020 if they could and urge the world's governments to make different decisions?

Whether it's a day, a year, a decade, or a whole lifetime, there're times when we wish we could chuck life into reverse and do things differently. Choose different words to speak. Act in a different way. Handle a relationship better. Sometimes we just want to do life differently. I think the wishing goes deeper than just doing differently. More than anything we want to *be* different. Our doing reveals our being, who we are, how we see ourselves, one another, and the world. Being and doing are intimately connected.

Wishing we could do things differently, reflects our deepest wish to be a different creation. It's really our wish for the first day. Think about some of your first days. The first day as a school student. The first day as a married person. The first day as a parent. The first day of that job or vocation you had been waiting for and working hard toward. The first day you took seriously, as a matter of life and death, your faith. First days are filled with light. They hold the promise of all that might be. There's an excitement, newness, and innocence to first days. First days are vibrant, alive, full of dreams and possibilities.

I imagine that's how God looked at the first day, in the beginning. No harsh words had been spoken. No feelings had been hurt. No relationships had been broken. There was no guilt, regret, or shame. There was only light; the light of life, the light of love, the light of promise and hope; the light of God. And it was good. The first day is always a day of new creation.

Sometimes as I talk with and listen to people, I hear things like, "Oh, I wish I could go back and do this or that." A married couple might ruminate, "We want to go back to the day when our marriage was..." How many times have you said or thought, "If only I'd..."? One thing I want you to know is that it's not wrong to express these sentiments. These and many more like them, are all attempts to recapture the first day. We can't go back to the way it was in one sense. But from a different perspective, we can! First day wishing isn't really about turning back time. It's about becoming a new creation, a new being. Ultimately, it's about returning to the waters of Jesus' baptisms.

Every time we return to the baptismal waters, we return to the first day. Creation and baptism are inseparable. They're intimately connected and mirror each other. Listen to what Genesis says about creation, and how St Mark describes Jesus' baptism:

- In the beginning a wind [or breath, or spirit] of God swept over the face of the waters.
- At Jesus' baptism the spirit [or breath, or wind] of God descended on Jesus as he came up out of the water.
  
- In the beginning God said, "Let there be light".
- At Jesus' baptism God said, "You are my Son, the Beloved."
  
- In the beginning "God saw that the light was good."
- At Jesus' baptism God was "well pleased."

Creation and Jesus' baptism are God's gifts to humanity. Everything God does God does for humanity. Jesus didn't need to be baptised. We needed him to be baptised. The baptismal water didn't sanctify Jesus; he sanctified the baptismal water.\* His baptism is not the means by which we identify with him, but the means by which he identifies with us. Our baptism allows us to participate in his baptism.

Through Jesus our humanity was present and baptised in his baptism. Our humanity was the humanity upon which the Spirit descended. Our humanity was the humanity to whom the Father spoke and with whom he was well pleased. Our humanity was recreated in Jesus' baptism. It is the first day. In baptism we are a new creation, a new being.

Every time we return to the baptismal waters we claim our identity in Jesus as beloved sons and daughters. Every time we return to the baptismal waters God again manifests and reveals himself in humanity. Every time we return to the baptismal waters we return to that first day of light, love, life, and the promise of all that might be. In Luther's words, baptism 'is nothing else than the slaying of the old Adam and the resurrection of the new creature... Thus a Christian life is nothing else than a daily baptism, begun once and continuing ever after.'\*\*

Whatever your life has been or might now be, the baptismal waters await you. So, return to the water. Let the waters of God's life wash and rid you of fear, resentment, and despair. Throw yourself onto God's mercy. Immerse yourself in the water of God's love. Splash in the waves of God's forgiveness. Paddle through the pool of God's grace. Dive deep into the gift of having been created in the image and likeness of God. Drift in the stillness of God's peace. These are the waters of new birth. You are a new creation. You are beloved in Christ. So come on in, the water's fine! Amen.

And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

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\*The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, Kolb and Wengert, 2000 Augsburg Fortress, page 458, Paragraphs 14-18.

\*\*The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, Kolb and Wengert, 2000 Augsburg Fortress, page 465, paragraph 65.

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