

Epiphany 1, Year B
The Church of the Redeemer, Greenville, SC
The Rev. Catherine Tatem
January 7, 2024

Genesis 1:1-5 Psalm 29

Acts 19:1-7

Mark 1:7-11

There is an ancient legend that says that as the apostles were about to go out into the world, they thought that they might agree on what they would preach. Berard Marthaler, in his book, *The Creed*, reports the legend in this way:

“...Peter said, “I believe in God the Father almighty...maker of heaven and earth”...Andrew said “and in Jesus Christ his son...our only Lord”...James said “Who was conceived by the Holy Spirit...born from the Virgin Mary”...John said “suffered under Pontius Pilate...was crucified, dead and buried”...Thomas said “descended into hell...on the third day rose again from the dead”...James said “ascended into heaven...sits on the right hand of God the Father almighty”...Philip said “thence He will come to judge the living and the dead”...Bartholomew said “I believe in the Holy Spirit”...Matthew said “the holy Catholic Church...the communion of saints”...Simon said “the remission of sins”...Thaddeus said “the resurrection of the flesh”...Matthias said “eternal life.”

In legend, then, the apostles gave us this early creed, the statement of belief, of the church and used for baptism into the body of Christ. We who have been baptized in many faiths, with full immersion into running water, or with water poured over our heads, are taken into the waters of baptism in the name of the Trinity: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. It is in this living water that we are united with Jesus, dying to our former selves and raised into new life in Christ, with Christ.

Some of today is about beginnings. In the words from Genesis we hear about a voice that hovers above “the deep,” a voice that conquers chaos. That voice is “pneuma,” spirit, breath, and in that spirit is life. **Life** blows over the deep even before the first day of creation. Surely God is there; God in the Holy Spirit is that breath, that “pneuma.” We read, right from the beginning, that God is with us in darkness, even in chaos, and that it is God who can tame chaos even before there is light in the world. Genesis reminds us that there is nothing and no place beyond God – God is with us in chaos, in darkness, and God overcomes every dark, uncertain place.

The life-giving Spirit active in creation now hovers over the waters of baptism and breathes new life into us. The same Spirit descended upon Jesus in the Jordan River. In baptism, then, we are connected to the creation of the world, to Jesus, and to God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. God who created everything that is brings each of us to life and to life again – new life – through the sacrament of baptism.

Evan is being baptized today. In the sacrament of baptism and through his grandmothers, godparents and each one of us, he is accepting the love and power of God into his life. To be baptized is to choose a particular way of being in the world, to choose a way of life. We promise to support Evan, “with God’s help,” always with God’s help, to live into the promises we made

in baptism. This is not only Evan's but also our covenant with God. In a few minutes we will renew our own baptismal covenant. We will bring the ancient words of the Apostles Creed into the present day.

When we baptize Evan and when we renew our baptismal covenant, hear the water, envision a beautiful Spirit breathing over and into them. Take that Spirit into yourself. Then hear the powerful words:

"You are my beloved child. With you I am well pleased."

When you come to take communion today, I invite and encourage you, before or after you take bread and wine, to touch the waters of baptism. Dip your fingers into the baptismal font and renew the sign of the cross made on your forehead at your own baptism. You may use the oil, called chrism, if you'd like. Hear the words: *remember your baptism*. In sight, sound, touch, the smell of water and oil – with all of your senses, you have renewed your immersion into the full life of the church. You have risen to renewed life in Christ. We embrace Evan with joy into this worldwide community of faith. Yesterday, January 6, was Epiphany, the church's celebration of Jesus as the light of the whole world. Right now in nature the days are lengthening. There is a little more daylight each day, right at the time that we celebrate Jesus as the light of the world. Water, bread, wine, the Holy Spirit, God, the light of the world – into all of this we bring ourselves, and into this we bring a beloved child who already brings light and joy into this place. What a beautiful, beautiful day.