

“Enough of This”

After watching the images of the Capital being breached by insurrectionists who were, at a bare minimum, encouraged to do so by the President of the United States, I had a very hard time sleeping. My mind continued to wander back to and reflect on the lectionary passages for Epiphany Sunday, in particular, Genesis 1:1-5

In Genesis 1:1-5, the primordial reality is described using three metaphors that throughout the Old Testament, are metaphors that are used to describe evil. Darkness, deep water, and the Tohu Wabahu. So, before the creation of the world, God came and hovered over a primordial world that was evil. Darkness pervaded, deep water which was understood by the ancient Jews to be Satan's domain was present, and a swirling, violent, chaos (Tohu Wabahu) was the norm. As God hovered over this primordial reality of evil, God spoke into that realm of evil. God spoke, and light and land and life came into being.

Throughout the Old Testament, there are a few select places where this “creation motif” is appealed to, in order to make sense of God's activity in the world. In the story of the Exodus where the Egyptians oppressed the people of God, the primordial metaphors of evil (darkness, deep water and the Tohu Wabahu) are utilized to give context to the evil the Egyptians brought to bear on the people of God. In like manner, through Moses and God's people, God spoke into this reality of evil in order to liberate the people of God. In a strikingly similar manner, when the people of God were oppressed by the Assyrians, the Babylonians, the Persians, the Greeks, and then the Romans, the violent oppression of those empires were described using the primordial metaphors of evil (darkness, deep water and the Tohu Wabahu). And again, through prophets such as Isaiah and Jeremiah, and through the very people of God corporately, God spoke into the reality of evil to bring about light and life.

In the New Testament, the gospel writers frame the birth of Jesus in terms of creation theology. Matthew suggested that the world was covered in darkness and marked by a swirling, chaotic, violent evil. Herod, the “King of the Jews” is a paranoid, narcissist who is concerned with nothing more than his own power and well-being. Josephus, a first century Jewish historian, said that it was safer to be Herod's “pig than his son”. Although Josephus' remarks were rich with irony,

because the difference in the Greek between the word “son” and “pig” is just one letter, there really was nothing funny about the actions of Herod. It is a well-documented historical fact that Herod killed at least two of his sons, because he perceived them to be a threat to his power. Herod was a brutal, violent, unjust ruler.

Whereas Matthew went to great lengths to position the birth of Jesus in the context of Herod’s dark reign, Luke went to similar lengths to position the birth of Jesus in the context of dark, Roman domination. Rome ruled much of the known world at that time, and did so through violent force and oppression. Rome demanded that a significant “tribute” of the best of all goods be sent to Rome, compounding the suffering in all places where Rome ruled.

It was into this dark, evil world that God once again spoke. Through Zechariah and Mary, God spoke of the inbreaking of God’s kingdom of justice, salvation, and light into the darkness of the world. And then throughout Jesus’ ministry, God continued to speak into the darkness of oppression and bigotry with the good news of God’s kingdom. And when an angry mob, incited by the High Priest, came to arrest Jesus and Peter drew his sword and lopped off the ear of the High Priest’s servant, Jesus spoke into that reality of darkness and simply said, “Enough of this!”

Most commentators correctly note that Jesus was not just talking to Peter, and telling Peter enough of responding to violence with more violence. The Greek suggests that Jesus was also talking to the High Priest’s abuse of power. The High Priest, along with the Pharisees and Sadducees, had sown seeds of discontent and lies among the crowds for the purpose of turning the crowds against Jesus. Which, we know, they were successful at doing as the crowds who had been following Jesus and praising him, quickly turned into an angry mob that cried out for Jesus to be crucified. It was by design that the religious authorities used their power to slander Jesus, thus making it much easier for them to crucify him. Into the incredible darkness of that hour, Jesus spoke, “Enough of this!”. Enough of slanderous lies, enough of power being abused, enough of hope being put in violence, enough!

I believe that God continues to speak today. God continues to speak into the dark, swirling, chaotic evil that so often characterizes and terrorizes our world. However, I do not expect God to speak directly as God spoke in Genesis 1 and only a few other places. Rather, I expect God will speak through God’s people.

We, like Moses, Elijah, Isaiah, Zechariah, Mary, and so many others are the mouthpieces of God. We are the conduits through which God's message of light speaks into our world of darkness. So, let me encourage all of us individually and all of us as a church, to speak God's truth into the darkness that is enveloping our world. Invoking a rare balance of courage and grace, let's be the mouthpiece of God and speak God's light into the midst of this darkness.

Grace and Peace,
Pastor John