

St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church

Creation by the Word

God's speech brings order into our chaos.

Scripture: Genesis 1:1-2:4a

Rev. Steve Filyk

September 12, 2021

Opening Hymn: All Creatures of Our God and King (Public Domain)

Chorus: Above All (LeBlanc/Baloche)

Communion: Psalm 23 (Townend)

Closing Hymn: Blessed Assurance (Public Domain)

At the beginning of our zoom Bible Study this past week.

I ask participants to finish this sentence:

“The world is _____”

After a summer of heatwaves and forest fires,

In the middle of the fourth wave of COVID,

While our church is breaking apart over changes in doctrine,

How would you finish this sentence?

“The world is _____”

I can imagine words like:

Tumultuous,

Disordered,

Confused.

If you describe the world like this,

How do you suppose the world would be described

By those who saw forest fires devour their homes

in Lytton or in Monte Lake?

I ran across one article that shared the account

Of some of those who visited Lytton after the

Fire swept through their town.

“Jennifer Thoss was one of the people
 who went on a bus organized by the... Regional District
 to get a first-hand look at what was left...

“It’s all flat,” she said in an interview.

“It looks like it’s powder. Oh, it’s very haunting.”...

“The bus was very quiet,” Thoss said,
 describing the mood of the people in the vehicle.

Some people chose not to take the tour
 because it was “too emotional and too soon,” she said.
 They exchanged stories of escape and “near death.”ⁱ

How do you suppose Jennifer describes her world?

PAUSE

Today Berna read the first chapter of the Bible.

Most of us are familiar with it.

We see it as the Bible’s story of origins,
 A description of how things began.

But this is maybe not the best way to understand it.

Renowned Old Testament scholar Walter Brueggemann
 Argues “... this text is not an abstract statement
 about the origin of the universe...

[but] a theological and pastoral statement
 addressed to a real historical problem.

The problem is to find a ground for faith in this world
when the experience of sixth century Babylon
seems to deny this rule of this God.ⁱⁱ

And you're thinking, I thought it was about human origins.
Babylon?

What happened in Babylon in the sixth century?

Sixth century Babylon was the time when the Jewish nation was in exile.

"The Chaldeans... deported the Jews
after they had conquered Jerusalem in 597 BC...

Somewhere around 10,000 people
were forced to relocate to the city of Babylon,
the capital of the Chaldean empire.

In 586 BC, Judah itself ceased to be an independent kingdom,
and the earlier deportees found themselves without a homeland,
without a state, and without a nation."ⁱⁱⁱ

Just imagine what it would be like
Not only to lose your home,
But to be taken captive by another nation.

One commentator notes:

"For the first couple of years in exile,
these core Hebrews were in a state of shock.
They had always believed that they were God's chosen people,
ruled by the anointed and chosen House of David.

They assumed guaranteed happiness, success, and eventual world rule because of their special relationship with God.

Now they found themselves captives,
banished from their country and their God,
whose address was the Temple in Jerusalem.

They had even seen the Temple, God's house,
the site where God showed presence on earth, destroyed.”^{iv}

We are given insight into this catastrophe
In Psalm 137, a Psalm of these exiles.

“¹ By the rivers of Babylon we sat and wept
when we remembered Zion.

² There on the poplars
we hung our harps,

³ for there our captors asked us for songs,
our tormentors demanded songs of joy;
they said, “Sing us one of the songs of Zion!”

⁴ How can we sing the songs of the Lord
while in a foreign land?

⁵ If I forget you, Jerusalem,
may my right hand forget its skill.

⁶ May my tongue cling to the roof of my mouth
if I do not remember you,
if I do not consider Jerusalem
my highest joy.

⁷ Remember, Lord, what the Edomites did
on the day Jerusalem fell.

“Tear it down,” they cried,
“tear it down to its foundations!”

⁸ Daughter Babylon, doomed to destruction,
happy is the one who repays you
according to what you have done to us.

⁹ Happy is the one who seizes your infants
and dashes them against the rocks.”

Psalm 137 is a song of people who are lost and mourning.

So imagine them in exile,
Hearing what Berna read for us this morning?

1 In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.

² Now the earth was formless and empty,
darkness was over the surface of the deep,
and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.

³ And God said, “Let there be light,” and there was light.

⁴ God saw that the light was good,
and he separated the light from the darkness.

⁵ God called the light “day,” and the darkness he called “night.”
And there was evening, and there was morning—the first day.

In those first verses in the Genesis
We are told there is nothing,
Or that if there is anything to be spoken of,
It is a chaotic abyss.

I think that those exiles could identify with this.

I think that some of you can identify with this.

The present seems dark and formless,

The future seems empty.

All that we can see around us
is a gloomy chaos.

But in this chaos God is present.

God speaks into this disorder, calling out:

“Let there be light!”

And we are told there was light.

Light that God deems good.

Order is imposed by God on this chaos,

There is now evening and morning,

The first day.

This process is repeated.

There is a command.

New life surges forth.

God judges God’s creation good.

This is a hopeful message for those people

Who were taken captive to Babylon.

And it is a hopeful message

To those of us living in fear of the chaos

We witness around us.

While it may seem like 'other gods'
of gloom and darkness control the future,
Have defeated those dreams God has given us,

We are told that our God reigns,
Not just over the land of Israel
But over all of creation.

The passage tells us that God is the Lord of life,
Who created all things,
And sustains all things.

This God who is so confident in his/her work
That God can actually rest on the seventh day
and enjoy what God has done.

In times of disorder Scripture invites us
To look at the world around us,
Not the machinations of humanity
And its empires which all end in dust...

We are to look wider, both higher and lower
At the world God has spoken into existence.

When we like those exiles
Are "Shackled in a prison cell,
with only a slender slice of sky visible...
[that] ongoing division between day and night

may be [the hopeful] sign
 that the Lord is yet creating order out of chaos,
 [that] the wind or spirit of the Lord
 [is] yet moving over “the waters.”^v

The people of Israel had to wait a long time (70 years)
 Before they were allowed to return
 And rebuild their homeland.

We honestly don't know how long COVID will last.
 There is lots of fuel left in our forests.
 We could have a decade of smokey summers.

As for the exile of the Church in our secular culture,
 It could last for generations.

If we are tempted to doubt God's power and presence
 maybe we just look at the stars above our heads
 Or the grass beneath our feet.

PAUSE

I mentioned that when the people of Lytton
 toured their charred townsite,
 That they were struck silent by the destruction,
 By the chaos they witnessed around them.

Not everyone joined the bus tour.
 Some made their own private excursions into town.

One resident named Tricia “went rogue”
 Entering her burnt-out property for her animals.

She found them alive and well:

Nine puppies and a 13-year-old cat named Simba.
She said they were “rays of hope”.^{vi}

So what are those signs of God’s presence

That give you hope in this time of darkness?

Could it be that they are all around us?

To God be the glory. Amen.

ⁱ "B.C. resident who owned home in Lytton says wildfire has left the place ‘flat’." battlefordsNOW, 10 July 2021, battlefordsnow.com/2021/07/10/b-c-resident-who-owned-home-in-lytton-says-wildfire-has-left-the-place-flat.

ⁱⁱ Walter Brueggemann *Genesis 25*

ⁱⁱⁱ "The Babylonian Exile." 10 Sept. 2021, www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/the-babylonian-exile.

^{iv} "The Babylonian Exile." 8 Oct. 2012, eweb.furman.edu/~ateipen/Religion12/Babylonian-Exile.htm.

^v Boyce, R. (2008). Exegetical Perspective on Genesis 1:1–5. In D. L. Bartlett & B. B. Taylor (Eds.), *Feasting on the Word: Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary: Year B* (Vol. 1, pp. 221–223). Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press.

^{vi} "B.C. resident who owned home in Lytton says wildfire has left the place ‘flat’." battlefordsNOW, 10 July 2021, battlefordsnow.com/2021/07/10/b-c-resident-who-owned-home-in-lytton-says-wildfire-has-left-the-place-flat.