

Genesis 1:1-5; Mark 1:9-11

In the beginning the earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. This is not an earth that would be able to sustain mankind. No light, no order, formless, nothing with which to support life. And God in His wisdom was not yet willing to call it good.

That which is good can only come from God, for God alone is good. And so God spoke: "*Let there be light,*" and immediately He saw that the light was good. When God speaks there comes that which is good; and unless He speaks there is nothing that is good.

So many people - some we know and even love; others we do not know - are like the earth in its beginning. They have a life that is in complete disarray. Their life is full of emptiness and darkness. Disorder reigns day after day. And might I suggest that what is true of them is also, more or less, true of you and of me. What is missing in such a life is the Word of God. God's Word creates order from chaos. It brings in light and fullness. It makes life good and pleasing to God.

Satan is the god of chaos and disorder. He reigns where there is disarray. He dwells in darkness for he is the prince of darkness. Yet he appears as an angel of light. But he is a false light, not of God, not good, but evil.

I have seen it, and so have you, the miracle of goodness - God's goodness in the lives of people; people for whom Christ died and rose again. People who had known evil in their past, who had seen only emptiness, who had lived lives of disarray. But then God spoke. Sometimes it was through this humble pastor that He spoke. Other times it was through another humble vessel; a dear Christian man or woman such as you. And as God's Word entered into the picture, lives were recreated. Light entered into where there had been darkness. Fullness filled the emptiness. Something good was taking place, and it was all on account of God's Word.

Now I think that because we're Christians, we think that we're supposed to have everything in life under control. Things are supposed to run smoothly; pretty much even keel. And we think that if anyone is supposed to have a life that is the complete opposite of disarray, emptiness, and darkness, it's us. After all, this is the life to which we are called.

And so when life takes a wrong turn; when we feel empty and void; and when we see more darkness in our little world than light, we punish ourselves, we feel guilty, we doubt our faith, we doubt our Lord. And it becomes difficult for us to admit to anyone that this is the direction our life has gone.

It may be that the Word of God has been mostly absent from our life, or that when we hear it we fail to apply it to ourselves. Instead of freeing us from our darkness, the speaking of God into our ears and hearts only serves to make our life darker, for we hear it as a burden and a threat - a standard we fail to measure up to - and not as promise, forgiveness, and hope.

Friend, look to your baptism. Your baptism flows out of Jesus' baptism for you. St. Mark tells us in our Gospel text that when Jesus was baptized, God spoke. He spoke the word of goodness as

He did in the beginning. “*You are My beloved Son,*” He said to Jesus, “*with You I am well pleased.*” Jesus is the embodiment of God’s light. And just as God saw that the light was good in the beginning, so when Jesus came up out of the water, God declared it good. But not for Jesus’ sake; for yours.

You see, your life, and mine, has taken many wrong turns over time. This is not where God has led us. It’s where we have led ourselves. The truth is that we would lead ourselves straight into hell were it not for the mercy of God. On this day of our Lord’s Baptism, this is where we see that mercy.

Jesus was born and was baptized not to show you how to live, but to live your life for you. Christ is your life. Your life is hidden in Him. And everything in His life is good and is pleasing to God.

And so there are days when we walk away from God’s light and enter into darkness. We become empty inside, for sin grabs hold of us and fills us. Our lives turn into disarray, and disorder reigns. We become like the earth in its beginning. I’ve been there, and so have you. We feel alone, perhaps loveless, worthless.

We need God to speak His good word to us. And He does. That word is in your baptism. No matter where you are in life, you have your baptism to return to. And it declares to you that you are in Christ, and that He is your life. Have you sinned grievously? See Christ Jesus washing you of your sin with your baptismal water. You are forgiven. Do you have a guilty conscience? In baptism God declares you innocent for Christ’s sake. Are you in a dark place, and not able to change? Neither was the dark and formless earth in the beginning. But God spoke and He created something good out of that dark, formless mass of emptiness.

God’s word to you is Jesus. Wherever you have been in life, however empty and evil in the past, you have Christ and He has you. What He did for you means everything. Through His death and resurrection your life is recreated. With you God is well pleased, for you are His dear child. Your baptism assures you of this, and it will never, ever leave you. Amen.