

C/H/B
11.1.15

GENESIS 1:4-11
MARK 1:4-11

BEGINNINGS

We have two scripture readings today about beginnings: the beginning of an ordered world and the beginning a new world order.

Common to both are the Word of God and the Holy Spirit.

1-God says '*Let there be light*' and there is light; God says to Jesus at his baptism '*You are my son whom I love*'- God's Word.

2- the Holy Spirit hovers over the deep in creation and the Holy Spirit descends on Jesus at his baptism.

God's Word, God's Holy Spirit. They make things happen. With God's Word and God's Spirit things can begin, whatever the circumstances.

So I've been thinking about beginnings- what those 2 accounts tell us about God, and about beginnings and how those things happen.

What do these accounts tell us about God?

- God is a creator of new possibilities. '*God created the heavens and the earth*' (v.1) And it wasn't just a one-step process. God goes on creating. He doesn't stop once a thing is in existence. He goes on moulding and making. God brings growth and life.
- God has authority and power- when he speaks things happen. We see that right through the Bible's history
- God fills things. There was emptiness and God made a beautiful, orderly, lovely, detailed world out of this void
- God delights in creation and in his Son – we hear several times – '*God saw that it was good*' (eg Gen. 1:4,9) and then at Jesus' baptism '*with you I am well pleased*' (Mark 1:11) God delights – he's pleased even before the world has done anything or before Jesus has got going on his big mission
- God loves – '*You are my son whom I love*' (Mark 1:11)

And then we add to that the picture of the power of the Holy Spirit. When the Holy Spirit is hovering over the deep new things are made; when the Holy Spirit comes down on Jesus, he's ready for all that's to come.

God is creator, with authority; he fills emptiness, he delights in good things, he loves and when the Spirit is there, there's power for new beginnings.

This is a really encouraging picture! If we have a new beginning to make, whether we're excited about that or overwhelmed by it, this is the character of God we can rely on to help us.

Beginnings out of darkness, space and chaos

Now there were some other common features at the start of the world and at the baptism of Jesus- darkness, water and space. Have you ever thought about that? God chose to operate first in darkness and space and the waters of chaos.

Let's use our imaginations for a while.

Darkness. Darkness in the Bible often seems to be bad. We hear about the horror of the plague of darkness in Egypt when Pharaoh refused to let people go and about the terror when it goes dark at Mount Sinai in the presence of God or at the crucifixion; we hear about the people who '*walked in darkness and needed light*' (Isaiah 60); when Judas goes out to betray Jesus we hear '*It was night*' and it's meant to show more than just the fact of the time of day- it was a bad thing; there are people who are '*darkened in their understanding*' (Eph 4) or '*darkened with sin and ignorance*'; and in Revelation, at the end of time there will be no need of light because the Lord God will be the light for all to see by.

But is darkness always a bad thing? We also get God saying '*I create light and form darkness*' (Isa 45) - God is the God of both; Psalm 139 has David saying if he tries to hide then '*even the darkness isn't dark to you- the night is as bright as the day*'. And even when God says '*let there be light*' he's not getting rid of the dark completely. Instead he gives the darkness a title – 'night' and makes a distinction between the night and the day.

So is darkness always a bad thing?

And though mostly we want brightness and Jesus coming into the world is about the light which is life (*John 1:4,9*), there are some times when I think dark is good.

My hyacinth bulbs are coming up. They need dark soil for germination; animals need the winter dark for hibernation; we use the night for rest; how about the great thinkers who find answers because they have 'been in the dark' and been compelled to find a breakthrough?; when we are lost is the time we look for pointers along the way; or poets or musicians who have produced the greatest works out of the darkness of difficult emotion...and most important of all a foetus grows in the dark and the space and the waters of the womb.

Darkness can be a place of life and growth and creativity. When the Spirit and power and Word of God are there in the dark of creation, a new world begins.

One song by Graham Kendrick says '*where darkness has been darkest the brightest light will shine*' We often don't see the light if it isn't dark to start with.

And what about space? 'outer space' fascinates us and accommodates the planets and the stars; in our own lives we know by instinct that we need to stop busyness sometimes and make what we call 'space'. We know we need not to fill every moment or we become exhausted in body, mind and soul. A spacious life is a life where new things can begin. It's uncomfortable to be cramped up in our bodies or our minds. The blank canvas, the empty music stave, the new screen on the computer, the calm mind, the open heart the opportunity for God or others to connect with us and help us imagine new things.

Out of darkness and space can come new beginnings.

In our society we tend to want to eradicate all difficulties and fill our time but

if we did there would be no buildings made out of rubble heaps, no friendships made because we wouldn't take the first step, no journeys made if we didn't know where they would end up, there would be no scientific research, no conception, no birth....

God makes a beginning in darkness, water and space. Jesus is baptised in the water that would engulf him and be a symbol of drowning and death. Jesus would die within a few years to bring the greatest ever new beginning. From the death and the darkness and space of a tomb would come resurrection. And the Holy Spirit hovered over the dark, the deep, the water of drowning in baptism and the dark of the death on the cross.

So friends, we've gone on a little imaginative tour of darkness and water and space. Yes, there is a good deal that seems bad about those things. But when God's word and God's Holy Spirit are present, I believe we see that creation and new beginnings are possible.

So take these things as hope for you. When it seems dark or empty or you're overwhelmed, it may be that you can find a new beginning with the creator God who has authority, who delights in good things and who loves all those he has made.

And remember a beginning is just a beginning. It is not complete and usually there will be more to come so if things have begun anew but don't seem perfect don't lose heart! God spoke and his Spirit hovered over the waters, in the darkness and in space and that was when the beginning of the world happened.