“Creator God, Creating Still” The Rev. Christine Chakoian
Genesis 1:1 – 2:3 First Presbyterian Church
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Introduction to the Scripture

We are in the midst of our series on the “foundations of faith” – using the ancient words of the Apostles’ Creed to deepen our understanding of what we believe. A few months ago I preached a sermon on other religions, and suggested that we owe it to the conversation to be equipped to say with clarity what *we* believe. After that sermon a great number of you asked for a series that would help you do just that. This series is offered in response to those requests, in the hope that this will help you know with greater certainty what you believe.

So what does it mean when the most ancient of creeds begins, “I believe in God the Father almighty, Maker of heaven and earth”? Last week, Amy focused on the first part of this statement in a beautiful exploration of the story of the Prodigal Son. God is the one who welcomes all of us wandering children home. This being Mother’s Day, it would not do to dwell there longer, on how God is like a father to us. But it is fitting to consider what it means that it is God who gives life to us – and not just we ourselves, but everything in heaven and on earth.

This core belief – that God is creator of heaven and earth – is even shared by the ancient Greeks long before Christianity. St. Paul reminds the pagan Greeks that even they pray to the one “in whom we live and move and have our being.” The Bible itself opens with God’s authorship of creation – and not just with one but two senses of that: this first story of Creation in seven days, and then, beginning in chapter 2, the story of God creating Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. If this first account is majestic and orderly, the second is equally messy: God, the cosmic gardener, scooping up mud with bare hands, shaping it into a human form, and breathing life into it. As different as these stories are, each shares this deep conviction: our creation and purpose are not random; rather, we are formed deliberately by the Lord God who makes everything in heaven and earth, and who has crowned us with a special calling. Some day I may return to spell out how this works in the

second story, the Garden of Eden; it is enough for today for us to focus on the first creation story which we heard read this morning. The story of the Spirit hovering over the face of the deep … and then the Word of God comes, and creation happens.

> In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters. Then God said, 'Let there be light'; and there was light. And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness. God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day.

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The first day of this week found me in Sarasota, Florida, for one of my national clergy-group meetings. This one is called "The Community"; there are roughly twenty of us in it. I could ill afford the time this spring, but this group is one of our best sources for finding new staff members. I took 20 copies of our job description for the new position of Associate Pastor for Youth and Young Adults; I came back with some good names.

In "The Community," we take turns hosting, and determining the programs, which are always interesting. But often the best part comes between the lectures when we catch up with each other and share our joys and worries. This year with the economy the worries outnumbered the joys in many cases, but in the end the joy is always more contagious than the anxiety, and we leave refreshed. For me, the moment came in worship when one of the young local pastors, Clay Thomas, gave the message one morning. It didn't hurt that we were worshiping on the beach. His message happened to be on the very passage I had chosen for this morning.

We all know the creation story, don't we? God's Spirit hovers over the face of the deep; and God's word commands the heavens and the earth out of a formless void … out of nothing, in other words, *creatio ex nihilo.* One of the 20th centuries great theologians, the existentialist Paul Tillich, says that it is in our DNA to remember that behind everything was this nothingness, this emptiness, and out of this comes every anxiety. But the flip side is also true: it is in our DNA to remember that we're part of the Ground of Being, and we find our courage in remembering that God creates us and all life out of nothing.

But, Clay Thomas reminds us, "there is another understanding of the creation story which engenders a different kind of hope. Genesis 1:2 reads, "The earth was *tohu' va bohu'* - a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep." This verse implies that God created out of chaos (*tohu' va bohu'*). This primeval chaos was shaped, fashioned, given form, and ordered by God." While I can confess *creatio ex nihilo* and sing … praises for the beauty of the earth, I do not know the experience of nothingness."

Yet you and I, we do know something about living in chaos: "We see the sea roar, nations rage, and kingdoms totter (Psalm 46)." We see the chaos of the economy and the destruction it has wrought. We know the chaos of difficult relationships and stress in our families. We experience the chaos of illness and loss, the chaos of the environment changing, the economy changing, our place in the global future changing. On a cosmic level or very close to home, chaos we can understand … we understand all too well.

What Genesis reminds us is this: it is the will and power of God to create life and order and goodness out of this very chaos. The Spirit that hovered over the face of the deep still hovers over the chaos and still brings life out of it. This is exactly what God did in the resurrection: God took the worst of death, the worst of corrupt political power, the worst of religious extremism, the worst of cowardly crowds, everything that conspired to kill Jesus on the cross … God took that and transformed it into resurrection. God created new life out of chaos. And God still does.

I want you to think back for a moment to some moment of chaos in your own life long ago. Maybe it was an embarrassing set-back … perhaps the loss of a relationship you held dear. It could have been a season when your life was out of control, through your own doing, or a loved one's or at the office or for that matter larger forces like the economy we're in now. Whatever it was, the chaos passed, didn't it? It wasn't painless, not by any means. You wouldn't wish experiences like this on anyone. But out of that time, something new came. God took the chaos of your life, and made something new out of it. Something beautiful, and good. And here you are today.

That's the beginning of creation: creating order out of chaos. Then God separates the sea and air and land, and fills them with fish and birds and animals and plants of every kind to feed them. And then, when everything else is complete, God adds the finishing touch: the sixth day.

> Then God said, 'Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.' So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.
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> God blessed them, and God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over every living thing that moves upon the earth.' And it was so. God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.
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> Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all their multitude. And on the seventh day God finished the work that he had done, and he rested. So God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it, because on it God rested from all the work that he had done in creation.

The very last thing God does in creation is to make human beings in God's own image. Now, think about that for a minute. What has Scripture just got done telling us about what God is like? God is creating … God is life-giving … God is always bringing order out of chaos. So when we human beings are created in God's image, and we are told to "subdue the earth" – it means not that we're to use it as overlords but that we are to bring calm, bring peace to earth … in God's image. As God's emissaries and stewards. That's who we are. That is our purpose and calling.

Who is the Lord our God? God is Maker of heaven and earth … the Creator of order out of chaos … the giver of life not once just long ago but always, and even now. And we … we are here to bring order out of chaos too, to be blessings to the world, to bring subduing peace. For God's spirit hovers over us, and over the face of the deep still and the waters of chaos will always be transformed again into the waters of life. Amen.