

Baptism of Our Lord

A BRIDGE OVER TROUBLED WATERS

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Genesis 1:1-5

Analysis by Ron Starenko

1In the beginning when God created the heavens of the earth,
2the 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. 3Then God said, "Let there be light"; and there was
light. 4And God saw that the light was good; and God separated
the light from the darkness. 5God called the light Day, and the
darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was
morning, the first day.

Diagnosis: Creation in Decline

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem) : *Sinking*

The time was when the balance of nature was complete, ascending, when there was neither too much, nor too little, "the waters...under...and above (v. 7), which God called "good" (v. 10). The time also came when toxic change occurred, human beings disturbing, distorting the creation, now "subjected to futility" (Rom. 8:20), "groaning in labor pains" (8:22). The result: we have polluted our waters, leveled the forests, precipitated global warming, and depleted our water supply. What is necessary to sustain life on our planet, the water, now receding, our very existence here being threatened, we find ourselves sinking. This problem, as a personalized painful experience, Simon and Garfunkel hint at in their '70s hit, "Bridge Over Troubled

Water.” The Psalmist also understood the problem when he prayed, “Save me, O God, for the waters have come up to my neck. I sink in deep mire, where there is no foothold. I have come into deep waters, and the flood sweeps over me” (Ps. 69:1-2).

Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem) : *Slipping Deeper*

The human problem goes deeper than our misuse or abuse of creation. The image of troubled waters mirrors our relationship to the created order and thus to the Creator. Not only are we bad stewards, worse than that, we are rebels. Our hostility toward the creation is really our hostility toward the Creator. What God created as good in the beginning, we have defiled. By our disharmony, by our disobedient spirit sweeping over the waters, we slip deeper into our estrangement from creation and thus from our Creator.

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) : *Drowning*

Spirit-less, we are drowning, not from what comes from above, but by what comes from below, from our hungers and thirst, metaphorically speaking. In the well-known story of the Flood in the days of Noah (Gen. 8-9), God devastated humankind because “every inclination of the thoughts of our hearts was only evil continually” (8:21). The watery grave was not the accidental result of devastating flooding; our undoing is rather the direct result of our not honoring or thanking God. St. Paul wrote that “God gave them up to the lusts of their hearts (Rom. 1:24). The worst trouble of all, God gives us over to our own devices, as we drown ourselves, deserving to be swallowed up by the deepest of waters, no bridge to save us.

Prognosis: Creation on the Rise

Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution) : *Crossing the Waters*

The universe in peril, God is still God, as the Spirit continues to “cross over,” bridging the waters, making good the promises

of God (Cf. the ELW, "Holy Baptism," p. 230). In his Baptism liturgy, Martin Luther highlights the Creation story, the Flood story, the Exodus story, ending with the Baptism of Jesus in the Jordan River. In all these stories of drowning and rescue, there is "a coming up out of the water" (Mark 1:10), the emergence of new life, from chaos to order, from inundation to salvation, from disaster to deliverance. Beginning with the baptism of Jesus, already a sign and seal of his death and resurrection, the ultimate turning point, all creation is now on the rise. Just as the Spirit "swept across the face of the waters" (v. 2) when the creation in the beginning began to emerge, that same Spirit now blesses Jesus' ministry, as he becomes the agent of the new creation, when finally he dies and rises to redeem, Good Friday and Easter being God's answer, he provides the bridge over troubled waters.

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution) : *Emerging*

Spectators only, we remain unaware that we both part of the problem and part of the solution, until the Spirit moves over the troubled deep of our world and our own lives. Because the Spirit is ever creating, she brings forth new life, blessing us to become good like Jesus. Today's second lesson (Rom. 6:1-11) is St. Paul's classic description of the rising power of our own baptism, the Spirit birthing us into Christ Jesus, immersing us into the faith of the Church, as we ever die to sin and rise to new life. Creator Spirit, the Lord and Giver of Life, is active still sustaining the created order, and present as well in the creation of the new, the body of Christ, rescuing and buoying us with the gospel, creating faith and hope and joy in our hearts, as we love God and care for all that God has made.

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution) : *Healing*

If indeed the creation is in turmoil and humanity is foundering in troubled waters, then by virtue of the healing water of our baptism we have received a ministry, in the image of Jesus, to

reach out to those who see nothing but trouble in their world, the dispirited who experience life as not so good, who are overwhelmed by disorder and decay and death, waiting for some sign of God's shalom. For such in need, the Spirit continues to sweep over God's people, turning us into bridges, people who feed the hungry and provide for the homeless and reverence our environment, as those who would rather light a candle than curse the darkness.