

Genesis 1:1 – 5 Mark 1:4 – 11

Genesis 1: 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.*

Mark 1 ¹*The beginning of the good news about Jesus the Messiah the Son of God,* ² *as it is written in Isaiah the prophet:*

'I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way' –

³ *'a voice of one calling in the wilderness, "Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him."*

⁴ *And so, John came, baptizing in the desert region and preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.*

⁵ *The whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem went out to him. Confessing their sins, they were baptized by him in the Jordan River.* ⁶ *John wore clothing made of camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey.*

⁷ *And this was his message: "After me will come one more powerful than I, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie.*

⁸ *I baptize you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."*

⁹ *At that time Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan.* ¹⁰ *As Jesus was coming up out of the water, he saw heaven being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove.*

¹¹ *And a voice came from heaven: "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased."*

It's pretty dismal and dark at the moment isn't it. Long nights, short days, gloomy weather, even gloomier news with the number of cases and daily death rate reaching record levels as we feel that we are the mercy of something that seems to be beyond our control. And it's not just corona virus, many commentators have described last Wednesday, Epiphany a day when we celebrate the *Light of the world*, as being one of the darkest days in the history of the United States as the mob invaded the Capitol in a bid to change the result of a democratic presidential election. We are desperate for good news and the offer of hope. And with the rolling out of the new vaccines there is good news, but in our gospel reading we have just heard about new that is even better: *Mark 1 The beginning of the good news about Jesus the Messiah the Son of God*,

In many ways, the beginning of Mark's gospel, like the beginning of John's gospel echoes the *In the beginning of Genesis*

:1: *"The beginning of the gospel = good news - of Jesus Christ"*

So, I want to begin at the very beginning with the first few verses of Genesis and the Good news about God.

When this account of creation we find in Genesis, was being handed on from one generation to the next around camp fires and family tables most people in the world lived in a very fearful, very chaotic, very dark world. It wasn't just that life was hard and there were constant dangers from disease, or bandits, or invasion, or cruel and capricious rulers but for most people the whole cosmos was an unpredictable and frightening place. It was ruled by terrifying forces, at the mercy of different gods and elements who had to be pacified in various ways and who often acted completely randomly.

It is into this kind of world that God reveals himself and says I am not like that at all, nor in fact is the world in which you live.

God says that without him, yes the universe is place of darkness, without form, an empty wasteland, without meaning – it is chaos. But then there is God, the Lord of all, our good and loving Creator - God who has ultimate power over the chaos,

Where there was chaos, God brought shape, form, order, purpose

where there was emptiness, God brought fullness,

where there was darkness, God brought light.

Moreover, God has made everything good (7 times in the 6 days of creation – the last time being *very good*)

We see that God is not some blind, unseeing, unfeeling life-force, nor is he some mythological unpredictable god who itself is at the mercy of others, but He is the supreme King and creator.

“Mummy did God make everything?” “Yes” “Even lions?” “Yes” “...But wasn’t He frightened to?”

Yes, God is big – bigger even than lions!

And so what God says, goes – it happens. Not only did God call into being things that did not exist, but it is only by his word and will that things *continue* to exist and be held in form and order. Without God’s word and will everything will just slip back into chaos and darkness.

The second law of thermodynamics is one of the fundamental laws of physics = the law of entropy – energy will always try to dissipate. Flanders & Swann

you can't pass heat from the cooler to the hotter

Try it if you like but you far better not-er

'Cos the cold in the cooler will get hotter as a rule-er

'Cos the hotter body's heat will pass to the cooler

or, as Professor Brian Cox puts it: *Entropy describes the fact that everything eventually spreads out like melting ice-cream.* And yet for reasons that an atheist like Brian Cox cannot explain, we see on earth the development of life and intelligence and human beings. Perhaps Brian Cox should read: Psalm 104: which recognizes entropy long before Kelvin did in the 19th century: *How many are your works, O LORD! the earth is full of all your creatures, which you made in your wisdom; ... When you hide your face, they are terrified; when you take away their breath, they die and return to the dust.*

but also understands why that is not the whole story: *When you send your Spirit, they are created, and you renew the face of the ground.*

For all our modern culture and technological advance, the world we live in is not so very different from the time when God first started revealing himself to mankind. We live in a world where people are often living in fear of dark forces, whether it is the devastating effects of coronavirus, or the breakdown of democracy or more and more extreme weather conditions brought about by global warming.

We certainly live in the world where the principle still holds true that where people ignore the word of God, entropy happens.

Marriages and families break down, truth becomes a rarer and rarer commodity, corruption increases, the very fabric of our society begins to fall apart.

It is not only creation that is sustained by the word of God, it is also that our lives, our culture can only be sustained by the word of God.

The good news of Genesis is that God says: *Let there be light.*

God was not content for the universe to remain a place of chaos and darkness. His purpose is to fill the world with his light.

And when God says: *Let there be light.* There *is* light. God is more than able to bring light however great the darkness.

God *is* light, so when God says *Let there be light,* He is deciding to invade the chaotic universe with his presence. And He says *This is good.*

And then he separated the light from the darkness. God is more than able to confine the darkness within bounds, to limit where it holds sway.

Our world might seem a dark and chaotic place, but Genesis reminds us that ultimately God will bring about his purposes, ultimately the darkness will be confined and God’s light and life and goodness will triumph.

Back to the start of Mark’s gospel, *The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.* This is about the beginning of the *new creation.*

John is the messenger, speaking the word of God, coming out of the desert waste, the wild place.

In the same way, the people are coming out of a spiritual desert waste, lives that have been without form or purpose, lives marked by sin, selfishness and darkness. God’s word is wonderful news: *what they have been longing for is now about to happen – the Lord is coming to rescue them – the Messiah who will*

baptize them with God's own life-giving Spirit and give them new spiritual life. And so the people need to get ready.

How can they get ready? By repenting i.e. separating themselves from the darkness, turning away from their dark deeds and attitudes

As people respond by queuing up to be baptized, Jesus joins the line. If people recognize him at all it is only as a local carpenter.

Jesus identifies with the ordinary people, with their need to repent, to turn their backs on their old life, by being immersed in the waters of the river Jordan - just as they were.

And then as he comes up out of the water, there is an *epiphany*, a revelation:

Just as with the first creation, the Father is present and the Spirit is hovering over the water and God speaks: *And a voice came from heaven: "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased."*

This echoes Genesis where God says: *"Let there be light," and there was light. God saw that the light was good,*

As Paul puts it in **2 Corinthians**: *For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.*

Mark wrote his gospel for a small vulnerable church that constantly felt under threat from the crushing power of mighty Rome. It was natural for Christians to ask how can we survive? Let alone grow and change the society around us. As we face the huge challenge of coronavirus and all the restrictions of lockdown, we might find ourselves asking the same questions.

The persistent message of Mark's gospel is that nothing can stop the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, spreading and bringing new life into people's hearts and into communities. This might well have seemed highly unlikely to those early Christians reading or hearing Mark's gospel: *"How can our small Christian community survive the all-powerful might of the Roman empire? The very idea seems crazy!"*

But two thousand years later, where is that all-powerful Roman Empire? However, the church is not only still here –it has grown and spread across the whole earth - something the Roman empire never did.

The same God who said *Let there be light* and by his Holy Spirit created this beautiful planet out of darkness and chaos, has come into our world and into our lives to baptize us with that same life-giving Spirit and create his everlasting kingdom. So however dark or dismal things might seem, let's be encouraged and renewed with the *good news* – the wonderful news – *about Jesus the Messiah the Son of God.*