

Making Sense
By Randy Orwig
Genesis 1:1-5 and Mark 1:4-11
Elon Community Church, UCC
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This is the season of Epiphany! We have now entered that time and the Christmas tree actually is still appropriate in Epiphany. I know most of you won't keep your tree up through Epiphany. In fact, many of us, on "Twelfth night" (*last day of Christmas*) take it down then or before. But the light of the tree and the light of the candles is representative of Epiphany. Epiphany is the season of the "Aha," the season of that renewal of the light in our lives, the season of an awareness of God and what it can mean for us. This season is always bookmarked. Epiphany, no matter how long it is, it's always different because of Lent. We never know where Lent and Easter will fall on the calendar. It is based on a cycle that has to do with the moon and the Vernal Equinox. Sometimes Epiphany can be a very long season, sometimes it can be a very short season, but no matter what, we almost always begin Epiphany with the story of the baptism of Christ, and we always end Epiphany with the story of the transfiguration of Christ, when he goes to the mountaintop and is transfigured before the three disciples. In both instances we hear similar words of God saying, "This is my son, with whom I am well pleased." The phrase varies a bit as it has some different connotations in each story, but what's clear is that this season brings out an emphasis on revealing Jesus as the Christ. How that revealing takes place can happen in many ways.

I am also appreciative of the other lesson the lectionary reading brings us today and that is Genesis, chapter one. Now many call this the creation story, so we have used it to argue over the centuries, especially with the introduction of science, that this somehow is something that's superior to science. I don't have time for that today. We have a congregational meeting and we need to move on. What I see here is a very important line, and that's why this scripture lesson just talks about the first few verses of the whole chapter, Genesis, chapter one, and that is, "In the beginning, God was creating." Then it says that the world was without form, or void. I don't know exactly what that means to you, but there is a sense that there is no order, there is nothing there that has any sense of organization, any sense of understanding, is formless. We sometimes call that chaos.

Now, I'll tell you what's been driving me crazy all morning, is seeing that curtain hang over the pillar up front (*running over to fix it*). Now there's order again. I've even had people come through the line when they are shaking hands and say, "You've been driving me crazy all service because your stole was this way or that way. There are some times that we have that sense about us, that what means order can be very important and it important to different people in greater, lesser, and different ways. Some people require a great deal of order, and in a sense what's being represented in this story in that God is bringing order to chaos. I think that's what we do as well. We want to, as the sermon title says today, make sense of our lives. Make sense of what this is all about. So in this beginning, there is a beginning of an ordering.

Now, I want to be real clear about something. Ordering does not mean conformity. Order does not mean that everything and everyone has to be exactly the same. In fact, if you look at the beauty of God's creation, we understand that God celebrates diversity in all God does. Even in the simplest ways, although we don't get to see it this winter luckily so far, every snowflake is different. I imagine that if we looked at every blade of grass, it would be different. I imagine that

if we looked at every daisy, it would be different. The only time we see a level of conformity is when there is influence of the hands of humanity. We like conformity, but that's not order. Order is the understanding of what we bring and how we bring ourselves into a world of which we are not in control. Now God, on the other hand, who is in control, allows for this great sense of order to begin, and the writer of Genesis celebrates that moment.

Then we fast forward to Mark, where we read the beginning of Mark, and what is the order that Mark wants to create for us, for the reader, for the receiver of the Gospel? It's not the birth account. It's not any childhood account of Jesus. It's John the Baptist coming to the river and baptizing with water, and then Jesus appears, he comes to the water, and the baptism, makes everything different. When Jesus rises out of the water, even though everyone has come forward for repentance, Jesus comes out of the water and the skies open up. In fact, Mark, unlike the other Gospel writers in the Greek that is written, emphasizes the sense that the sky was ripped open or torn open, stating that something new is about to take place.

There is something I want to say about that as well. When we try to make sense, we often create order or we accept an order that already exists. In accepting that order we find that our lives have meaning and purpose. There are times when the order we follow needs to be reordered. Do we understand order to be of only one kind, or is there a diversity of orders and how we shape our lives based upon that chosen order? Some of us would say there are people who have no order in their lives. They decide what they are going to do, based on what some would call chaos, sometimes we use that term chaotic. I'm not sure I agree. I think that they have decided that their particular order is not ordered by God. It's not ordered by the love, by the reality that would help them thrive. There's something about this story, there's something about this moment when we think about our own ordering of life... how we order what we do... how we shape our behavior, begs the question, what is behind it? In Genesis, God is behind it. In Mark, God is truly behind it. The revealing of the Holy Spirit upon Jesus allows us to see that something very special is about to take place.

So the question remains, how do we order our lives? Do we accept certain orders that we see around us and we take for ourselves, or do we sometimes have to create that order, even sometimes having to recreate that order. What issues are we going to face in 2012 that will require us to see how we order our lives? Today we are going to celebrate baptismal renewal. Baptismal renewal is as much about the vows as it is about the water. For many of us, we're not able to understand the vows when the baptismal vows took place. We're infants! That's why we can celebrate today the beginning of our Confirmation class, because today we are going to begin the process of affirming the baptism of 6 young people. So together we will affirm the vows we stand behind, the sacramental vows of following Jesus, of being the people that God has hoped we would become, of ordering our lives in such a way that we can share love, peace, and justice.

Today is the sacramental morning. It's a sacramental morning because as Jesus goes down to that river with a great sense of faith. We've so reduced church to being some kind of salvation station. Screw up during the week, come here and get it fixed, and then go back out and screw up all over again. In fact, if you haven't sinned enough, maybe you can take off a week of church. So repentance gets reduced to that. Repentance, in my mind, is a way of us understanding the big picture. How do we operate? How do we live? How do we negotiate all that life brings to us? And how do we respond? It's in the power of baptism that we find the truth of who we are and whose we are. We need to be reminded of our baptism. We need to celebrate it. We need to renew it. This is the day, this is the moment. Amen and Amen.