

When God began to create, all there was to begin with was “the stuff up there” and “the stuff down here.” “The stuff up there” was called “the heavens,” and you can bet that the ancient folk who looked up and claimed that God created all things did not know anything about outer space. The “up there” was simply the top of the “down here.” And the “down here” that God started with was exceedingly messy—and dark. Here at the very start, all we’ve got is a shapeless, wet mass in the dark—like swimming in oil with the lights off.

That’s what the first verse and a half of Genesis seems to say. We’ve got a mess here and God is working on it. In fact God is doing something that none of us can do. To prove it, the first verse of Genesis uses a word for “create” that’s only used about God in the Hebrew Bible. It’s the Bible’s way of saying God is performing something that isn’t comparable in any way to what humans do. God is starting something no one else could start, making a beginning like none other we have ever seen begin. For all of this incredible beginning, “you ain’t seen nothin’ yet.” Because you haven’t.

It’s still lights out. Listen to the message version of the Bible’s first two verses: *“First this: God created the Heavens and Earth—all you see, all you don’t see. Earth was a soup of nothingness, a bottomless emptiness, an inky blackness. God’s Spirit brooded like a bird above the watery abyss.”* There’s a rushing wind, a mighty divine energy sweeping over this basic watery stuff of life. The word for “wind” in Hebrew is also the word translated “Spirit” or “breath.” The Spirit is God’s Spirit, the wind God’s wind, the breath God’s breath. This gust sweeps over the deepest, most dangerous waters around. That’s how God starts creation.

Might not make much sense, especially to people who like to debate the difference between science and religion. But if you listen carefully, Genesis 1:1-2 puts us in a real mess—a wet, dark, and windy mess. Now, who would start creating in the middle of such a place? God would. Genesis chapter 1 tells us God’s creation takes place in the middle of chaos, where there’s nothing solid to stand on. In this black soup nothing is moving toward life, just yet, and you can’t see what’s going to hit you next.

When the ancient Hebrews heard this story, I’m sure they heard it differently than we do. They didn’t think of the sky as we do. They saw the sky as an upside-down bowl with holes letting water and snow through. But they heard this creation story with the same human need to make a fresh beginning, as we do. How else can we explain the Genesis creation story’s power in synagogues and in churches across the centuries? Genesis has been able to give hope to all kinds of people, from the simplest illiterates to the smartest PhD’s.

It’s because God’s creation didn’t simply happen a long time ago. Give Genesis a chance and you discover that this same God, through the words of Genesis, starts again—in the middle of our chaotic lives—to bring order, light, regularity and stability. All humans need a few basic things. We need the sense that Someone made this world we live in and that the Someone who put it together hasn’t left us. We need to know from the beginning of our lives that our Creator enjoys us and invites us to partner with him in his creation. Otherwise, we won’t be looking for God to continue his divine work among us.

If God merely created and then after setting this universe in motion no longer paid any attention to us or lent a hand to us, what good is it knowing that God put all this stuff here, including us? If God has no

continuing creative connection with this world, then it's a bit like giving birth and throwing the baby out in the street. But our faith directs us to look at life expecting God to bring order out of chaos and to see God's continuing creation in the rest of the Bible's story, even in the ministry of Jesus.

If we follow Jesus after his baptism, as he itinerates around Galilee and into Judea and finally to Jerusalem, we notice that when Jesus comes on the scene, chaos breaks out again. Evil decides to fight back when Jesus arrives in town. Jesus starts teaching in a synagogue "*and immediately there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit; and he cried out saying, 'What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us?'*" Jesus spends the evening at Peter's house and suddenly at the door "*the whole city was gathered together,*" interrupting his evening.

Jesus shows up in Capernaum and people are digging through the roof of a house, disturbing an orderly afternoon's preaching. Jesus walks beside the sea and passes a toll collector, and the guy just gets up and leaves his job and lets his employer worry about how to collect their taxes. Social chaos occurs when Jesus arrives. Instead of spending his time with the good religious folk, he upsets the norms of his culture and ours. He eats with tax collectors and sinners. He overturns the sense of a sacred calendar, where everyone knows what should and shouldn't be done on particular days. When Jesus is around he upsets the apple cart as people turn into a mob. So much chaos breaks out around Jesus that his best friends think he might be insane. Jesus even questions the bonds of family, and lets people freely interact with those outside of their blood relations.

If you judge Jesus by the American majority opinion, he seems a mere lover of children and a teacher of compassion. You might wonder why in the world he was killed. Why would anyone murder such a fellow? In the story of the gospels, however, you see the world start coming unglued when Jesus is around. Chaos attacks from all quarters, and when he gets to Jerusalem the whole town is in an uproar. In Jerusalem evil makes its last stand against him. Finally there occurs the travesty of a trial, the trips back and forth across town at night by the conspirators, culminating in darkness over the land at midday and an earthquake shaking everyone off their feet and breaking rocks in half.

Do you see where Jesus' crucifixion leaves us? Chaos has taken over again, like it was before God started creating—just blackness up there and all shaking down here, and chaos seemingly in control. That's the center of what the Bible shows us about creation—not so much the six days of the first creation, but the miracle of Jesus' coming to life on the first day of the new creation. Jesus, who seemed overwhelmed by evil, battled those elements and won. The darkness is gone. We see life in the light of Jesus the Messiah. The almighty God of creation found the Old Testament has pulled off the greatest miracle of re-creation we can imagine in the New Testament.

Even now Jesus continues his ministry, sending his Spirit to blow over our lives, blow life into us, and blow us into a life of living faith for his sake. You think your life is crumbling to pieces? You assume you live a dark, directionless existence? No. You live in the world inhabited by the Spirit of Jesus—he's the one who keeps trying to create something beautiful from the mess of our lives. You assume you've failed for the last time? Jesus won't accept that conclusion. Jesus does what no one else can do. He re-creates us—again and again and again. Feel as though you're at the end of your rope and have no room to tie a knot and hang on? Jesus has been there, and he won't let us down. He's what God planned for us way back when God began to create at the very beginning.

God planned to make a beginning and then another beginning, and finally another beginning with us—all the beginnings we need until we're shaken to our knees in praise and thanks. This God of creation, the one who flung out the stars and rolled out the prairies and pushed up the mountains, the God who subdued chaos and established the earth, this is the God in Jesus Christ who loves us and has given his life for us and who will breathe his breath upon us and give us new life. God is ready to start over with us again. God will re-create us either on this side of heaven or the other.

So what makes this age old message so urgent? Earlier I said we all need the sense that Someone made this world we live in and that the Someone who put it together hasn't left us. We need to know from the beginning of our lives that our Creator enjoys us and invites us to partner with him in his creation. Otherwise, we won't ever look for God to continue his creative work among us.

Please hear me when I say that God is ready to start over with us, just as he did with the ancient Hebrews and the early Christians. That is because, since the beginning, God has never stopped creating—and he never will.

He is God of beginnings. Amen.