

Primary Reading: John 1:29-42

There's a creation story which comes from the Jewish mystical tradition. I'd heard it told a few times, but I heard it again this past week in an interview with Rachel Naomi Remen, a physician and writer.

Rachel was told this creation story as a gift for her fourth birthday by her grandfather. The story was told her that in the beginning there was only God's pure being, God's infinite light, or in Hebrew the *Ein Sof*.

Well at some point there was an accident, what would seem to be a great catastrophe, of cosmic proportions – the vessel holding the Ein Sof was shattered and the light of God was scattered throughout the universe into an infinite number of “holy sparks.” And these countless sparks are hidden deep in every person and every moment of this world. The deepest work of our lives then as humans is called *Tikkun Olam*: the restoration, the healing of the world. The revealing and joining together of these holy sparks to one another.

And with that, the creation story moves from the beginning of time – a wide-screen, cosmic perspective – down to the smallest of details in our lives. Suggesting that *you* – with a holy spark buried deep within you – you are exactly what's needed to heal the world. And in the telling of the story Rachel Naomi Remen closes with a question – *How would you live if this were true?* If you, right now, were *exactly what was needed to heal the world?*¹

Our Gospel reading for today starts in the middle of a similar story, in verse twenty-nine of the first chapter of the Gospel according to John. And we begin immersed immediately in the details of the world – a guy named John, a guy named Jesus, the crisp and fresh water of the Jordan River, a dove... and two disciples who ask Jesus where he's *staying* – where he's *hanging out*... And we might overlook the obvious: that we're immersed in a “real-world” story here, with the details washing over us like crisp and fresh water.

¹ The story is adapted from Rachel Naomi Remen's *My Grandfather's Blessings*, related in an interview on Krista Tippett's *Speaking of Faith*; distributed by American Public Media on Dec. 27, 2007 (www.speakingoffaith.publicradio.org/programs/listeninggenerously).

But rewind, if we will, 29 verses to the beginning of John's Gospel and we find a story that's actually quite similar to the creation story retold by Rachel Naomi Remen.

"In the beginning was the word, and the word was with God, and the word was God." The author John paints a perspective of the whole cosmos with broad-brush strokes. *"All things came into being through it... in it was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and darkness didn't overcome it."*

And then, quickly we become immersed in the details of a world which isn't too far from the world as we know it. *"There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. [John] came as a witness to testify to the light... The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world...And the Word became flesh and lived among us..."*

This cosmic creation story from John, many of us heard retold on Christmas Eve as we held our candles of light and sang of a silent night. Now just a few weeks later, most of us are immersed back in the details – sometimes mundane as they are – washing over us like crisp, fresh water...

The alarm clock goes off at 6:36 in the morning, 27 new emails pop up on the computer, 3 pages of math homework to finish, 42 papers to grade, a checkbook to balance, 3 credit cards to pay... the details of our lives wash over us, sometimes feeling less-than-refreshing, and as they pile up one after another, sometimes feeling more like water-board torture.

A lot depends on perspective, of course. Which is perhaps why we tell us these cosmic creation stories. To give ourselves a little perspective.

In the interview which I mentioned I heard this week with Rachel Naomi Remen – an interview which, I must admit, was like listening to the very Gospel, listening to good news – Dr. Remen suggested that *"the pursuit of perfection has become a major addiction of our time."*

The lie, after all, has long been for sale. It's been sold to us and by us – not just by ad exec's, but sometimes by the church... not just by our so-called secular society, but often in the name of Christianity. And the lie, simply put, is this. *Pursue perfection and faith will come.* Get your life

together and then God'll bless you. Follow Jesus and all your questions'll be answered.

But this isn't how the disciples come to be followers of Jesus in our Gospel reading today... "*as John watched Jesus walk by, John exclaimed, 'Look, here is the Lamb of God!' The two disciples heard John say this, and they followed Jesus. When Jesus turned and saw them following, he said to them, 'What are you looking for?' And they said to him, 'Rabbi...where are you staying?'"*"

Back and forth – it's an odd interchange of questions. But it's quite a reminder that the journey of faith doesn't begin with answers, it begins with questions! "What are you looking for?" "Where are you staying?" The journey of Christian discipleship doesn't begin with perfection or "getting your life together" it begins with *a God who takes the first step*, barely even asking us to follow... only asking of us to "*come and see.*"

A story's told of a young student who's picked to be the class photographer. This is long, long ago before cameras were the hand-held, light-weight objects they are today. The camera is large, cumbersome, and heavy and at first the young student experiences this camera only as a heavy burden, an obligation to be hauled everywhere the young student goes.

But soon the camera becomes something else. It becomes a constant reminder to look at "ordinary surroundings far more clearly, to become aware of beauty around [us] in some very unlikely places." It gives the young student "new eyes." Perhaps a good question can be like this camera on our journey through life, our journey of faith.²

"Where are you staying?" ask the disciples of Jesus. "*Come and see.*" responds Jesus...

Come and see my presence and my grace in every person, every detail, and every event says God. First, but not only, in the fresh, crisp water of the baptismal font... next, but not only in the food and drink of the table, but then *come and see my presence shining* – sometimes hidden very deep indeed – but shining nonetheless in every *story, every life, everything.* "*Come and see!*" says this God.

² This story is told in *Kitchen Table Wisdom* by Rachel Naomi Remen and related in Krista Tippett's interview on *Speaking of Faith* (speakingoffaith.publicradio.org/programs/listeninggenerously/particulars.shtml).

It's an invitation, as Rachel Naomi Remen reminds us, *that sometimes what appears to be a catastrophe, over time becomes a strong foundation from which to live a good life. It's possible to live a good life even though it isn't an easy life.*

God has created you, as the creation stories remind you, as exactly what is needed to heal the world. *Come and see* that this is true. God invites you, after all, with all your questions, brokenness, and wounds to *come and see*. Amen.