

June 18, 2017 • Lay Speaker Sunday • Father's Day

“God and Chaos”

Sermon by Ron Theile



Romans 5:1-8

Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand; and we boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God. And not only that, but we also boast in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.

For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. Indeed, rarely will anyone die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person someone might actually dare to die. But God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us.

Chaos! Webster describes chaos as complete disorder and confusion. I am a middle school teacher. I know exactly what they are talking about. I am not the exception nor is the profession of teaching. We have all experienced chaos at one time or another in our lives. Of course, we all have experienced chaos on different levels or different intensities. Allow me to present to you several instances in my life that I experienced utter chaos.

I was on the first YSP, that is, Youth Service Project, that went to New Orleans right after Hurricane Katrina hit that city. I remember going to the Rayne Memorial United Methodist Church, unloading my luggage, setting up where we are going to sleep, and then deciding that it was time for me to explore. I went downstairs to the main level and immediately saw strands of yellow caution tape across a pair of double doors. Being the adult that I am, of course, I looked around, moved some of the tape, opened the doors, and entered what was left of the sanctuary. If Chaos has a look to it, this was it. I stood in awe and wonder as I saw the top of the steeple of this church that had come down through the roof. I stood in silent horror as I imagined a hurricane slamming into this church and, like a hand of the devil, twisting the steeple of this church off and then slamming it down with as much force as possible, through the roof, and stabbing the altar with the cross and the top of the steeple. I was horrified and I must confess a bit afraid at the scene that I gazed upon. I dare to call this demonic chaos.

I also experienced chaos at school other than the day to day events like passing time after the bell rings. I was hired away to Mark Twain Middle School from a middle school in East LA that had 4200 students. Now Mark Twain, at that time, had 1250 students. The difference between the old school and the new one, that is Mark Twain, is that the school in East LA had only one gang. That was the 18th Street gang. Mark Twain Middle School, at the time, had eight separate west side, city, and national gangs on the campus. Now I have to remind you that this was in the very late 1990s and very early 2000's and that the campus is now peaceful and has a population of wonderful families and students. However, at the time you could not believe the chaos that occurred when two, or three, major factions of the student body came together for a fight. It was pure, unadulterated, and uncut chaos. Students and adults were injured, students were arrested, and if that wasn't bad enough, parents who were also gang members drove them to fights after school.

My last example also comes from school and, in particular, one of my first bell choirs with the school district. Carlos, a good friend and a very popular older brother of Erica, a ringer, lost his life in a home fire. Erica spent six weeks in the hospital recovering from burns and smoke inhalation trying to tear off the bars that trapped Carlos in the house. The very next week, Jorge, a bell ringer and a gang member of the 57th Street Crew of the 18th Street Gang, who was put with the ringers in an attempt to sway him from the gang life, was cornered at Carmelita and Gage and gunned down by rival gang members. The bell choir, and myself, were lost in a chaotic sea of grief.

And I can go on with other experiences. Such as Jasmine finding her father in the embrace of another woman and the marriage ending in divorce. The twins whose mother left in the middle of the night and they were left to live with their grandmother with the chained refrigerator and not being allowed to turn the lights on at night to do their homework which they then had to do by flashlight and more than enough personal chaos for one teacher to deal with in a lifetime.

Today we face a world that is extremely complex. We feel it as adults and our children have the challenge of adjusting every day in the most complicated period in recorded history. We are inundated from multiple sources that keeps us abreast, within seconds, of every news worthy event: disasters, bombings, murder, riots, police shootings, tornadoes, hurricanes...and I can go on and on. Practically every headline, news report, radio bulletin, and internet alert these days proclaims one essential truth: The modern world is in chaos. As Billy Graham once stated, “We are caught in a whirlwind of anger and outrage; violence and abuse of power; fear, terrorism and war; economic uncertainty; and new national alignments of power and commerce.” If anything, the events of the past year should cause people to realize that our world has changed.

Each one of us and the people of the world are crying out for a message of hope. This begs us to question, “Where do we look for this message and how do we find peace and tranquility amongst the chaos. It helps to understand that, time and

time again, throughout time, the result of chaos, in the end, is always creativity. We only need to look at the first few verses of Genesis in our Bibles. Through the many translations that I looked at, the words that were most in common with almost all of them were, "The earth was without form." That means to me that something was there that God took and created what we call earth. From chaos to creativity. If you lean towards the scientific approach, I present to you, "The Big Bang." So, out of something that was the size of a bee-bee, we get what must have been the ultimate chaos of matter. From that chaotic mass of matter it has taken 13.6 billion years of creating galaxies, solar systems and planets that bring us to what we have today. From chaos to creativity.

At Rayne Memorial United Methodist Church, I left what remained of that destroyed sanctuary, through those double doors, turned right and through another set of doors that led me into a sanctuary that had been converted from their social hall. I seem to remember a certain church that did the same after an earthquake struck it in 1994. Even the city immediately began to rebuild after suffering almost \$44 Billion in damage. In these natural disasters, we recreate and then create better ways of predicting and surviving these disasters. From chaos to creativity.

But, what of the human toll that people suffer from, not only world chaos, but the type of chaos we struggle within our day to day lives. Certainly these 11 to 14 year old young people have taught me a thing or two about surviving chaos that hits close to home. From surviving chaos on campus to the death of a close friend, to the death of a fellow student, to a friend who is being tore apart from discovering an unfaithful father and to twins who are abandoned by their own mother and must endure the resentment of a grandmother. They have taught me that we discover God is there within the comfort, love and care that they show each other at every turn where there is a need.

This is the message of Paul to the Romans in the gospel this morning. He writes, "And we boast in the hope of the glory of God. Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us. You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless." This is where we find the message of hope that the world seeks today.

So, where do we find God within the chaos? We find God in each and every one of us. We, as the children of God, receive His grace and love. It is up to us to take that grace and love and let it flow through our hearts, mind and souls and out to those who need peace, love and comfort in their time of need. We must be the hope in this chaotic world of ours. Because we carry that hope, in our hearts, that God Almighty has graced us with.

I close with something that I read last Thursday in Readers Digest. It is the true story of a girl named Auburn. The story opens with Auburn laying on a dirty and cluttered carpet in the fetal position. She has been addicted to drugs for several years, was married to another addict, and had a small baby boy. While on the carpet, she holds, in her hand, a small piece of paper her mother had sent her. She was now going through withdrawals. She kept on folding and unfolding the paper and looking at the phone number of a Christian counselor. Finally, she crawls over to the phone, lifts the handset, and dials the number. The person who answers the phone is heard lifting the sheets off a bed and sitting up. This person answers with "hello", and Auburn states that she got this number from her mother and asked this person if he could talk to her. He answers, "Yes, yes, yes. What's going on?" Auburn states that she had never talked to anyone before regarding her situation and she writes that, after a few minutes, she began to tell him all the truths. Auburn writes in this article that the man did not judge her but simply listened. After some time Auburn asked if this person was supposed to tell her to read Bible verses. She said that it would be cool, alright, I'll do it. The voice stated, "Well, I'm glad this was helpful to you." She again insisted on the Bible verses because, of course, he was a Christian counselor. The voice said, "Auburn, please don't hang up, I've been trying not to bring this up." She asked, "What?" The man said, "You won't hang up?" She said "No." "I'm so afraid to tell you this," the man said, "but the number you called" and he paused, "you got the wrong number." They continue to talk until the sun came up. She goes on to write that after that conversation, she decided to turn her life around. Her precious baby boy did go to school and graduated with honors from the University in 2013. She ends her story with this. "This is what I know. In the deepest, blackest night of despair, if you can get just one pinhole of light, all of grace rushes in."

Praise be to God for his grace and his love. Let that grace and love flow from us to others so that we can be the pinhole of light, the hope, so that all the grace rushes in.

Benediction:

And now we leave this sanctuary under the banner of our risen Lord. Yes, there is chaos beyond those doors. But, we will survive because God our Father has graced us with his love. May that love flow through each one of us, so that we might offer to each other, and those we meet: love, comfort, peace and hope. In Jesus name.

Amen