

“On Being and Becoming”

November 3, 2024

Based on Genesis 1:1-3. God says, “Let There Be!” And There IS!

Being, we think, or at least I think, is serenity. Stillness. Oneness with all that is. Peace in the Eternal Now, as Eckhart Tolle might say.

So what do we do when the *now* is chaotic? Turbulent? Anything but peace?

Author Anna Blaedel, who writes on the theopoetic intersections of spiritual, academic, and activist engagement, says simply this week what we know in our bones to be true:

Nothing is fine.

We are anxious over the election, but even more we are anxious about what the stakes say about our *being* as a people. Regardless of who wins or loses, is *this* who we really are? Really?!

We are anxious about injustice in Palestine, in Sudan, in Ukraine, and right here at home, but even more we are anxious about what the stakes say about our *being* as a people. Is *this* who we really are? Really?!

We are anxious about our jobs, about money, about expanding inequality, about climate change, about our children, but even more we are anxious about what the stakes say about our *being* as a people. Is *this* who we really are? Really?!

We are anxious about our church and all the change that has unfolded so quickly and so unexpectedly, but even more we are anxious about what the stakes say about our *being* as a people. Is *this* who we really are? Really?!

We are anxious about death and dying and living with some kind of depth of integrity, but even more we are anxious about what the stakes say about our *being* as a people. Is *this* who we really are? Really?!

Being, we think, or at least I think, is serenity. Stillness. Oneness with all that is. Peace in the Eternal Now, as Eckhart Tolle might say. So what do we do when the *now* is chaotic? Turbulent? Anything but peace?

The authors of the first chapter of Genesis give us a clue.

When God begins to create something new in us and through us and beyond us, this chapter says, a wind-like Spirit of God swoops and hovers and broods over this *Being* of ours that is not at all fine. Yes, this is really who you are, the Spirit admits. But it is not yet who you will *Become*.

When God begins to create something new in us and through us and beyond us, this chapter says, the deep watery darkness of anxiety that envelops us, that floods us, that *weighs on our heart like the sea*, as the poet says, becomes instead transformed by that brooding hovering Spirit into an amniotic fluid of faith that buoys us, that lifts us up, that celebrates us, cracked and flawed as we are in the fire kiln of life, but still useful, still graced, still *very good*, as God declares on the sixth day of Creation.

When God begins to create something new in us and through us and beyond us, this chapter says, God says, *Let there be light! And there is light!* And the darkness cannot overcome it.

What is not readily apparent in the plain words of the text is that this first chapter of Genesis is *itself* composed in a time of chaos, turbulence, and anything but peace. Although it appears at the very beginning of the Bible, the composition of this first chapter of Genesis actually takes place much later, roughly 500 years before Jesus, after the people have been exiled from their home and forced into labor through the power of their abductor in Babylon.

The people of the first chapter of Genesis are also anxious about their lives, anxious about their community, anxious about death and dying, not at all sure who they are or who they are becoming, subject to powers far greater than themselves who wish to keep them subordinate. In fact, *anxiety* is too tame a word to describe their experience. The religious narrative of the culture of this foreign land is in fact used to justify their forced labor. The Babylonian creation myth describes humanity as slaves to the gods and large swaths of humanity as slaves to a minority who represent the gods on earth. You may be familiar with the African American Spiritual *By the rivers of Babylon, there we wept, when we remembered Zion*. That is the experience of those who compose the first chapter of Genesis.

So what do the people do, anxious about who they are and who they are becoming, weeping as exiles by the rivers of Babylon?

They re-write the narrative!

Line by line, verse by verse, the authors of the first Chapter of Genesis re-write the Babylonian creation myth from *their* perspective. They insist on their Being *in the image of God*, not slaves to the gods. They insist on their Becoming *co-creators with* God, with this earth as a place of delight, not a factory of forced labor. They insist their Being and Becoming as humans gifted the right and the responsibility to practice fidelity and fealty among all parts of creation.

And then, lo and behold, as the authors of the first Chapter of Genesis re-write the narrative toward a God who speaks Being into existence, they end up, as our poet describes, *holding the words as they are also held by the words*. The very act of re-writing the narrative empowers them to speak their *own* Becoming into existence, as they insist on hope through the chaos, faith through the turbulence, and love through the labor pains of it all.

And they succeed! They cannot know it when they write it, but the authors of the first chapter of Genesis do indeed eventually triumph over despair, as their captivity in Babylon ends, and they get to go home and rebuild, wiser and more discerning on the other side of the turmoil.

Our job is to do the same today.

When religion is used to justify violence and hatred, we re-write the narrative toward a God of love. When religion is used to denigrate and disable, we re-write the narrative toward a God of justice. When religion is used to stoke fear and retribution, we re-write the narrative toward a God of mercy. When religion is used to suffocate and eliminate, we re-write the narrative toward a God of freedom.

Friends, we cannot help but be anxious about who we are and who we are becoming, in our church, in our lives, in our nation, around the world. *Nothing*, as Anna Blaedel says, *is fine*. What we can do is re-write the narrative.

God is still speaking a new creation into existence in us and among us and through us and beyond us. This anxiety and pressure that feels too much to bear are in fact the labor pains of this new creation, and all of creation is groaning in labor with us and with God as a new day dawns and a new narrative takes hold.

Through us, in us, among us, and beyond us, God is still saying, *Let there be light. And there is light!*

And the darkness *will not EVER* overcome it!