

September 14, 2025

Rev. Mike Eller

“Chaos and the Seeds of Becoming”

Genesis 1, Matthew 13:1-9

We had a really wonderful Fall Retreat last weekend on the banks of the Camp Johnsonburg lake, or pond, as the locals call it. It was a great turnout at the retreat—Many of you made at least one of the two days, or at least got to join live on Facebook for Sunday worship.

It was our family’s first time at the camp and to attend the retreat. And while we went into the weekend exhausted, we left rejuvenated. Maybe it was the tempurpedic mattresses. But I really think it’s a testament to the rich fellowship we have here. My girls were immediately asking about when we could go back, even before we left the camp ground.

This year’s retreat theme was *Belonging and Becoming*. To get these two words in a healthy place, is a recipe for a thriving community that contributes not only to the flourishing of its own but to the wider community.

Belonging and Becoming. I was really encouraged by the conversations I was hearing around the small group tables and in our large group discussions, particularly around the idea of belonging.

We talked about the awareness a Christian community needs to have in our time to foster true and deep belonging. We also talked about what barriers we often construct—whether seen or unseen, intentionally or unintentionally—which contribute to an inhospitable community dynamic and prevents the space needed for belonging. If you want to see some of the bullet-points from those discussions, I’ve posted two large pads of paper out on the lobby wall. Spend a few minutes reading through what we’ve been brainstorming.

In this sermon, I want to unpack the second of those two words from our retreat theme, *Becoming*. We are all in the process of becoming. The world is still becoming. Look around at those seated around you: Each are in the process of becoming—your friends, your enemies, your family members, your neighbors—each are being fashioned one day at a time, moment by moment,

in hopes to flourish into a fullness, a wholeness, that vividly reflects our Creator.

The Bible in Ephesians 2 claims that “we are the product of [God’s] hand, *heaven’s poetry etched on lives*.” I love how the poetic translation *The Voice* says it. Other translations say that we are God’s “workmanship” or “masterpiece”. We bare on our lives, in our bodies, the mark of God’s creativity, walking works of Divine art, God’s love-project of creation. And celebrated just as we are, even as works-in-progress.

You and I manifest this identity whenever we ourselves engage in the act of creating. I hear quite a lot from many who say: “I don’t have a creative bone in my body.” I fear that we often think creativity belongs solely to the realm of the creative arts: music, dance, painting, poetry, and the like. But you create whenever you choose to speak a healing word, or a word of peace, in a tense situation. You create when you choose to show up to be a presence in the midst of someone’s pain.

Our capacity to create is immense, even if sometimes paradoxical. One moment, we are enraged, cursing those drivers around us as we are stuck in traffic, and yet, in another moment, we ooze compassion over a friend who is dying of cancer. We boil red hot over the stinging comments of a coworker and yet our hearts grow a mile wide at the wedding of a friend. We have both the capacity to stunt someone’s process of becoming or contribute to its wild flourishing. That is both frightening and hopeful. It reminds us that we are still in process ourselves; And because we are, it means creation is still unfolding right in front of our eyes from that first act of creation at the beginning. So, what does it look like to continue joining God’s ongoing act of creation today?

Now things might get a little theological here. Christian tradition has historically believed that God created the universe from nothing, expressed in the fancy Latin phrase, *creatio ex nihilo* (“creation out of nothing”), that into the absolute nothingness, God spoke, “Let there be...” Yet, that’s not what we read in the poetry of Genesis 1. It says that “a dark fog draped over the deep while God’s spirit-wind hovered over the surface of the empty waters.” The image here is not of an empty void but one of a world in the state of complete chaos.

The Creator doesn’t speak into the nothingness, but hovers over those primordial chaotic waters and summons something of beauty out of it. Picture

a potter hovered over a large chunk of unformed clay. As one commentator put it, "The 'chaos' is the raw materials of 'becoming'."

As I meditated on that image this week, I thought of the art of Angela Haseltine Pozzi of the Washed Ashore Project. Angela founded the nonprofit which takes harmful plastic pollution from the Oregon beaches and transforms it into amazing marine life works of art. I wish I could show you photos of these inspiring pieces. She does this to educate the public about ocean plastic pollution, taking what is meant for harm and turning it into something good.

I also thought about activist, Shane Claiborne, who teamed up with artist Jacob Hammes, in a project of melting down decommissioned guns in Philadelphia to create garden pieces such as fire pits, planter boxes, and other works of art as part of their "Peace Garden" in their community. Taking what is meant for harm and turning it into something good.

Take any story of someone who has been abused, by another, perhaps by the church, and some years later formulating a ministry from those deep, dark, chaotic waters to counsel others experiencing similar trauma. Taking what was harmful and turning it into something good.

These, and so many others, are ways today the Spirit continues to hover over the chaotic waters in our communities and summons life and light.

We know what the chaos looks like, don't we? For you, it might be caring for a loved one, or burying one far too early. Maybe it's an abusive relationship or the disintegration of the family structure that once gave you security. It might be the chaos of mounting health bills, or growing tensions at work. "The 'chaos' is the raw materials of 'becoming'."

And in those formless waters, we are reminded that life is a series of endless beginnings, each and every moment a Genesis, which literally means *becoming*. The good news is that we are never alone in this. God is looking for collaborators, to continue what was set in motion at the beginning. The One who spoke, "Let there be..." The One who gave creation a blessing and said, "[Now go,] be fruitful and multiply..." These are not the commands of a coercive God but a God who lures us through potentiality and possibility.

In the New Testament book of Matthew, this luring God is depicted as one who gently sows seeds of possibility. In the parable of the sower in chapter 13, Jesus is sharing about the nature of the kingdom of God. And the parable he gives doesn't picture a controlling God, speaking with commanding words,

demanding certainty... But the gentle, patient work of the sower—who, before the path is walked, is there tossing those small, delicate seeds of possibility, little invitations. These seeds precede our arriving. They are already there, new in every situation, waiting to take root and grow in us, to grow us. It is WE who resemble those various paths onto which these seeds fall—sometimes so caught up in our own ways, at such a breakneck pace, that the seeds have no chance to take root and are instead quickly enjoyed by the birds.

Some of us are hardened by the chaos of life and like seeds on a rocky ground, they lack the soil to allow that possibility to form into any new life.

Some of us are the dry, cracked earth; and without any depth of vulnerability, shallowness and superficiality cause the seeds of becoming to be scorched by the sun.

Some are so entangled by life's complexities, maybe the weeds of unfulfilled dreams, the thorny branches of grief turned sour and septic, that any new growth is immediately choked out.

And yet, there are those who cultivate that deep, rich soil so that any new seeds of possibility will be discerned on the path, and quickly take root in us. But notice how all along the patient sower allows this process of seeding and growth to unfold, never coercing the process with a heavy hand. I imagine the sower gently renewing with more possibility those times we are not ready for what is there. "Here, now try this." "How about this time?" "Let's try again."

This month marks a turn toward creation on a global scale. From September 1 to October 4, we enter a "Season of Creation" where Christian communities all over the world join together in prayer and action to protect our common home. This is a celebration of God as Creator while also being a re-commissioning as co-collaborators in the work of ongoing creation. This year, the theme for the season is "Peace with Creation." This season hopes to call us to a deeper realization that "Our well-being is interwoven with the well-being of the Earth."

Perhaps it starts right here in our own congregation. What are those seeds of possibility toward earth-care that are being spread before us this month and going forward? What grounds are we cultivating now onto which these seeds will fall... individually, as a church?

The kingdom work of the sower is risky. A non-coercive God risks, in love, the possibility that you or I will not continue the work of creation. And we

have seen the devastating effects of those choices. But love requires partnership and does not force its hand. So God must be intimately involved in our lives for the sake of the continued becoming of the world, of you, of me. God grieves deeply with us, belly laughs in the surprise of our immense joys, inspires us, brings moments of awe and wonder, insists on us, pleads with us, nudges us, and calms us with peace.

Christian tradition once preached that God is the *Unmoved Mover*—How can the Supreme Being be affected by its creation? Yet, Christians today say that instead, God is the *Most Moved Mover*, deeply affected by the goings-on of creation. We lean into that intimacy and celebrate the joy of that partnership.

To close, I believe every moment is seeded with possibility toward becoming. Our paths are sprinkled before us—every step, a chance for a new beginning, a chance of becoming, of making the world. But it is anything but an already-determined reality. “Let there be light” was not a one-time statement, but a daily commissioning, a question-mark, on our lives. Will we continue to call forth the Spirit to hover over the chaos of life, to summon something of beauty, of flourishing, again and again? May it be so.