

June 7, 2020 Readings Genesis 1:1-2:4a Psalm 8 2 Corinthians 13:11-13 Matthew 28:16-20

First of all, I am so grateful and honored to be here as your new pastor. You know you have a reputation in the area—of being caring and community-oriented congregations. I asked the folks at St. Paul in Missouri Valley about you and they said you were good people. My interactions with the call committee and the councils have certainly been consistent with that. I am eager for the time when I can get to know you better—and I pray that will be very soon. Of course, when we begin in person worship, there will be some who may not be able to be with us physically, but for various reasons will continue to worship with us online. We understand that. We will be working intentionally to stay in touch with our members. And you can contact me by phone, text (402-670-6055) or email (PastorBorgstadt@gmail.com) anytime. I also have a website with daily devotions and prayer suggestions. It's at GoodSoil.today. No spaces. You can even subscribe, and they'll come to your inbox automatically every morning and if the Spirit inspires you, I'd love to have you share your thoughts by writing some of the daily devotions or prayers. Just let me know.

In the gospel today, Matthew told us that the disciples worshipped the Risen Christ, but some doubted. Come on. They knew he was dead, and several of them saw him alive again. The tomb was empty. But still, some doubted. They knew it was important to worship, but there was just a little something nagging them in the back of their thoughts. This isn't the way things work, you know. Do you ever doubt God? I know I do. Just look around at the situation in our world today. As if a global pandemic weren't enough, we have economic anxieties and rapidly escalating tensions and social violence over how we treat others who are not exactly like ourselves. I hesitate to say anything about the

weather so far this spring for fear of jinxing it. All these tribulations are explained by some people as the result of us abandoning God. Others wonder if God has abandoned us. Doubt is no stranger to most of us these past few months and yet, we still worship. We need a little history to dig into today's scripture. If you're watching this at home, you may think this is the cue to get another cup of coffee. Make it fast, because I'm going to keep it short. Matthew wrote his gospel to persuade the Jews that Jesus was the messiah they had been waiting for. The only problem was that they were waiting for a powerful warrior king to liberate them from the Romans who occupied their land. They saw Jesus' death as weakness and made up excuses for his resurrection. It's recorded just a few verses before today's lesson. Matthew had to tell the Jews of his time that the kingdom of God was going to be something different from what they had expected. He also had to tell them that the realization of that kingdom was now up to them. The world was in a mess and the way out of that mess depended upon the very people that had abandoned Jesus just a short time earlier. A messy world was nothing new. If you will think back to the first part of the old testament lesson, you'll remember how the writer described creation. I have loved the first verses of Genesis for decades. You know I grew up in Davenport on the other side of the state. A friend in high school invited me to come and sing with the youth choir at a Lutheran Church. The new director, desperate for tenors, welcomed me and strategically got me to become a regular. He gave us individual voice lessons and to help me learn to control my breathing while singing, he would have me sing the first verse of Genesis on a single note, then go up a half step and do it again. "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was without form and void and darkness covered the face of the deep and the Spirit of God

was moving over the face of the waters.” Do it with me... The earth was without form and void. Without form—it was a whirling, swirling mess. It was void—there wasn’t anything you could get your hands around to hold on to. Chaos would be a good word to describe the world at this point. And the Spirit of God was moving over the whole mess. You know what the next verse says? Then God said, “Let there be light” and there was light. The word of God began to put things in order. In fact, if you read the whole first creation poem in Genesis, that’s what’s going on. God is putting creation in order one day at a time. God’s is making sense of it, making something out of what had earlier appeared to be nothing (remember, it was a void). Just three months ago, things were working pretty well, at least on the surface. Everybody was going about his or her business. We had heard that there was an ugly virus going around on the other side of the world, but it wasn’t affecting us. At least we didn’t think it was. And then, overnight, the world changed. We social distanced, washed our hands and if necessary, self-quarantined. And when that didn’t seem to be enough, we closed down everything except the things we deemed absolutely essential. Face-to-face worship was replaced with on-line worship because we couldn’t take a chance that some of our members would contract the virus and maybe even lose their lives. Our economy has had it downs and ups, we worry about how we’re going to process the products of agriculture safely. Most recently, the stresses of the times have exposed other long-term problems we have yet to solve. It is no exaggeration to say that we are in anxious and even contentious times. It is also no exaggeration to say that these are the times that God’s Spirit does her best work. When you think about it, the first disciples’ world had been turned upside down, too. They thought Jesus was going to change things—and he

did—just not the things they expected - nor the way they predicted. Not knowing what to do, they needed a word of order. Jesus gave it to them on the mountain. He said “Go.” They couldn’t stay locked away in a room somewhere, they had to go into the world. He said “Make.” They couldn’t wait for someone else to do what they needed to do. It was up to them. If they kept quiet, if they kept the Good News of God’s love to themselves, it would all be over in a generation. He said “Disciples.” Disciples are learners who commit to a defined way of doing things. There are several martial arts who have disciples, and each form has specific practices. There might even be disciples when it comes to agriculture. Specific seed companies, or even livestock producers expect farmers and ranchers to commit to standard ways of doing things. And the followers of Jesus are not an exception to this kind of focused discipline. Jesus told his followers that when they made disciples, they were to baptize and teach them. Baptism is the work of the Holy Spirit to inundate the disciple in the character of God. The Holy Spirit does this through our interactions in the church, the faith family. Jesus said to “baptize them in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.” One’s name told a lot about who the person was. Names weren’t given without looking to who the parents wanted the child to be. Jesus is a form of the word for “savior” in Hebrew. “John” means “God’s gift.” When one is baptized in the name of the triune God, he or she is immersed in who God in all of God’s expressions is. That’s what happens in the faith community—as we live out God’s characteristics of love, forgiveness, grace, peace, generosity and hope. New disciples experience God in what you and I say and do. Baptism is not a once-and-done thing—it happens continuously in the life of the Jesus community. Luther urged the faith community in his time to “remember their baptism daily.” As our communities

are surrounded by disciples demonstrating the characteristics of God, we teach them how to live the same characteristics in their own lives. In doing this, we are setting a life-giving normal in our communities, where mutual care and support are nurtured, where our behavior towards others is a matter of response, not reaction, of intention, not emotion, of drawing closer, not pushing away. We declare this as our priority every time we worship. Our opening words include this greeting: "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you." The response of mutuality seals the deal as we say to each other, "And also with you." What a time of opportunity we have as the followers of Jesus right here, right now. Our world is a chaotic, swirling, twirling, churning mess. It is ready for a word of light—for direction to life that is shared by all. And we have the assurance that not only the Spirit of God is hovering over the waters right now, but that Jesus has promised to be right here with us every day, until this current expression of creation is no more and we have a holy purpose—to speak light into the chaos, to fill our communities with the self-sacrificial love of God, so that others will find enough hope to give the Jesus life a try, too. Our days and individual actions are not going to be perfect, but our God loves us and is patient with us. May that love and patience flow through us and bring life to our communities today and every day. Amen.