

Lara Glass: Good morning.

Congregation: Good morning.

Lara Glass: Welcome to morning prayers. Please stand as you are able for a responsive reading from the black Appleton Psalter, Psalm number 84 found on page 42.

Lara Glass: "How lovely is your dwelling place, O Lord of hosts."

Congregation: "My soul longs, indeed it faints for the courts of the Lord. My heart and my flesh sing for joy to the living God."

Lara Glass: "Even the sparrow finds a home, and the swallow a nest for herself where she may lay her young at your altars, O Lord of hosts, my King and my God."

Congregation: "Happy are those who live in your house, ever singing your praise."

Lara Glass: "Happy are those whose strength is in you and whose heart are the highways to Zion."

Congregation: "As they go through the valley of Baca they make it a place of springs; the early rain also covers it with pools."

Lara Glass: "Behold our shield, O God. Look on the face of your anointed."

Congregation: "For a day in your courts is better than a thousand elsewhere. I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than live in the tents of wickedness."

Lara Glass: "For the Lord God is a sun and shield. He bestows favor and honor. No good thing does the Lord withhold from those who walk uprightly."

Congregation: "O Lord of hosts, happy is everyone who trusts in you."

Lara Glass: You may be seated.

Choir: (singing).

Cody Sanders: A reading from the beginning, Genesis 1:1-2. "In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters."

Cody Sanders: It is the beginning of a new academic year. Some of you are beginning life in a brand new city with a new degree program or job or fellowship. Some of you for the first time away from the place that you have always called home. For others of you, there's need of a new beginning later in life when your sense of purpose

and identity is no longer tied to your career post retirement. For many, there are beginnings again after the loss of a loved one. Learning how to keep your loved one's presence alive even in their physical absence

Cody Sanders: And the world we live in with all of its beauty and all of its brokenness, amid climate collapse and civilizational decline beckons all of us to ask about beginnings. How did we get here? What is the origin of the state of things, and is there the slightest chance of a possibility that we could begin again? So Genesis one is a good place to reflect today at the beginning.

Cody Sanders: And for all of the years that I have heard and read this text, my mind has been transfixed by an image of the spirit of God, gently hovering over the face of the waters of the silent, placid deep, but nothing could be further from what this text portrays. "And the earth was a formless void." The Hebrew here is fun to say. Tohu wa-bohu . An ancient cosmic primordial picture of absolute chaos and disorder. The usual perspective on this opening passage in Genesis sees the chaos as the backdrop for the creation that God is bringing about sort of a chaotic materiality without form swirling in the cosmos, resisting the possibilities of life, nothing but meaningless, havoc out of which God would impose the order of creation.

Cody Sanders: And this is often where we began with all of the chaos and disorder we feel in our beginnings and new beginnings and beginnings again, with all that seems to resist the possibility of life. Nothing but meaningless havoc out of which we feel the need to impose order and life. Beginning again in a new city with a new degree program or job or fellowship. A new beginning later in life when your sense of purpose and identity is no longer tied to your career post retirement. Beginnings again after the loss of a loved one, learning how to keep them alive even in their physical absence. And the world, the world we live in with all of its beauty and all of its brokenness beckoning us to ask how we got here. What is the origin of the state of things, and is there the slightest chance of a possibility that we could begin again, wresting some order out of the utter chaos that we're experiencing at the moment?

Cody Sanders: But there is another view about this Tohu wa-bohu within the tradition of interpretation. And I was a bit taken aback when I discovered it. This reading sees the chaos, formlessness, and deep void within the darkness covering the face of the deep, not as unruly, chaotic, and materiality counter to the divine intention out of which had to wrest some sort of order to bring about life and creation. On this reading chaos, formlessness, deep void, darkness covering the face of the deep is the first act of creation.

Cody Sanders: Consider how that changes how you hear these first verses in the book of Genesis and perhaps how we navigate the disorder of our lives and feelings of chaos in our own new beginnings. In the beginning before the first day of creation's order, when God began to create the heavens and earth, the first step, the first act, the first spark of creativity brought about an earth formless

and void, darkness covering the face of the deep while a mighty wind from God's creative spirit swept and swirled and spun over the face of the waters unending possibility.

Cody Sanders: Following this reading, another way of reading our own beginnings might go something like this. If there's a certain feeling of chaos in your life right now, if you've entered a void or wondering through a desert place, if there's a sense of formlessness to your life or your purpose at this moment, if darkness has covered the face of the deep for you, then maybe what feels for the time being like a despondent place or a desperate time or an absolute dead end might actually be the first step of a new creation. This might be the very time in your life when the words you need to keep closest to your heart are those ancient words "In the beginning."

Lara Glass: Please join me in offering the Lord's prayer printed on the reverse of your order of worship. Our father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever and ever. Amen.

Congregation: Our father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever and ever. Amen.

Lara Glass: Please stand as you are able to sing hymn number 243 in your crimson Memorial Church Hymnal. "Send Down Thy Truth O God" number 243.

Choir: (singing).

Lara Glass: In the words of John O'Donoghue, may we live this day compassionate of heart, clear in word, gracious in awareness, courageous in thought, and generous in love. Amen.

Congregation: Amen.