

Slime Becoming Something
Genesis 1:1-5 and Mark 1:4-11
© Stacey Steck
Preached January 11, 2015 at San José, Costa Rica

Through the ages, philosophers and sages have spoken of what they called “the divine spark,” something of God left within us or trapped within us that offers human beings a unique connection to God. Jewish and Christian theology suggests something similar when it talks about human beings being made in the image and likeness of God, that intimate connection described later in chapter one of Genesis. All of that may be true, but I believe there is a connection between creation and human beings that goes back even farther than that sixth day on which human beings were made. It goes back to the first day, in fact to before the first day when the earth was still a “formless void,” and God’s spirit brooded over the face of the waters. Genesis doesn’t use very precise language to describe the physical conditions way back then, but it is clear that there was something there that God decided to do something with, something like “waters” in a “deep”. I like to imagine it as slime, as ooze, as pretty yucky stuff you wouldn’t want to touch without latex gloves. No, no one really knows the chemical composition of that slime, but I do have a theory. Yes, I believe that the soup, the goop, the chaos from which God fashioned heaven and earth, is none other than the very same hormones our teenagers are producing. This makes the divine spark, in fact, the pituitary gland.

Maybe your high school science teacher never told you that the pea-sized pituitary gland was originally thought to be responsible merely for the secretion of nasal mucus. In fact, it got its name from the 16th century Belgian anatomist Andreas Vesalius who described it as *glans in quam pituita destillat*, Latin for the “gland that drops slime.” It wasn’t until the seventeenth century that the real endocrinological purpose of the pituitary gland was discovered, and for all intents and purposes, the name still applies, only now the slime is not mucus but the hormones responsible for puberty and adolescence, a truly slimy experience to be sure, at least it was for me and almost everyone I went through it with. Of course, the pituitary gland is responsible for all kinds of creation-oriented tasks in the human body like growth and reproduction. There is no “be fruitful and multiply” without the small but mighty pituitary gland. The common denominator between the primordial slime and the adolescent slime, is, of course, great chaos, and chaos is the medium by which God brings grace into the world.

Maybe you don’t remember very clearly going through puberty, but believe me, your parents do, and they will tell you that you were a mess, a hot mess of hormones and hair and bulges and acne and insecurities and questions and intolerable moodiness. Your life, or at least your family’s life, was chaos. Can I get an amen? Yet somehow, inexplicably, something acceptable came out of it, and here you are today, decent citizens one and all. I bring to mind this experience of chaos just in case it’s the only one you’ve ever had, in case you never experienced

turmoil before puberty, or haven't since then, in case you have forgotten what it's like to be a sinner with a life that is out of control, in case you never hit rock-bottom with no place to go and no one to turn to, like in so many great stories of people whose lives have been utterly transformed by God's grace. You've heard those stories about the hopeless alcoholics, or the unrepentant white supremacists, or the murderous gang members or the eighty-hour a week workaholics who come to Jesus, who are baptized, and the transformation is so striking that maybe it makes your own story of faith feel kind of puny by comparison. You see, many of you were baptized as infants, and raised in a Christian home, and you went to church and you learned about Jesus in Sunday school, and even though you slept through your Confirmation Class, you've never done drugs or robbed a bank or coveted your neighbor's wife or livestock. You are fine, upstanding members of the community. Where is the transformation in your life? When did chaos turn to order? When did darkness turn to light? When did the depraved sinner become the saint you are today? When did the slime become something other than slime?

The dramatic language and images we use for baptism, like rebirth, like dying and rising, create a tension when they are at odds with what many of us have actually experienced: that pretty tame life, growing up in a "Christian" home, attending Sunday School. The very stark difference baptism presents between life and death is not something that applies directly to every one of us. Perhaps we've had our moments of sin and shame, but we don't all reach the rock-bottom that

baptism seems to suggest. For those baptized as infants, the tension may even be greater; teenagers at least get to experience something resembling sin and make the connection before they go under the water, but even then, for many people it just doesn't add up. I remember that in the midst of the chaos of my puberty, as I was preparing for baptism, I was shown the fifth chapter of 2 Corinthians, the seventeenth verse, that reads, "Therefore, if any one is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, behold, the new has come" and to tell you the truth, it kind of confused me. It didn't seem like there was a whole lot that needed changing in my life. Not that I was perfect by any means, but I didn't need to be torn down like an old building and built up again from scratch. I mean, I had solid foundations, a good structure. I wasn't *that* slimy.

Well, the tension created by that situation didn't kill me, but it might have been nice to have been reminded of the news flash that Jesus wasn't some radically depraved sinner who had all his sins washed away in the Jordan and emerged a saint. No, Jesus was a good boy, raised in the faith of his parents, who was like a lot of us who have tried, despite our imperfections, to cooperate with God all along. And so, not to take anything away from the idea of baptism as marking a radical transformation, maybe there's also more to it than that. Maybe it marks the beginning of slime becoming something.

Maybe you never thought of it this way, but the creation of the world was an act of grace. That primordial slime never asked to be anything more than slime,

never aspired to be anything more, never deserved to be more than slime, but it became more than slime because God spoke a creative, graceful word. Before God created the heavens and the earth, the slime, or the hormones, or whatever it really was, was just a whirling mass of chaos, undifferentiated matter with no sense of direction, no purpose, no clue. And then it got baptized. God baptized the chaos with light and it began to take shape and form and beauty. And God saw that it was good, and the rest is history.

And then there's Jesus standing on the banks of the river Jordan, the world around him like slime made up of injustice, poverty, corruption, disease, war, degradation, chaos no longer simply undifferentiated matter with no sense of direction or purpose, but now with an intention to create more and more chaos, to return the world to the hormonally charged slime that God baptized in the beginning. And above it, God's spirit broods. And then he goes under the water, and God reenacts the creation of the world, making order from chaos once again. It was like that very first day when God said, "Let there be light" and the light came once again into the world, "and the darkness has not overcome it." It was a visible act of grace that began to take the moral and ethical slime of the world and make it something with shape and form and beauty.

And there you are at the baptismal waters, an over-stimulated infant dressed in a ridiculously ruffled gown, struggling in your parents' arms, or as a self-conscious teenager standing before the church hoping no one will notice the

newest blackhead on your face, or the scuff mark on your shoe, or as a well-traveled adult feeling hot shame on your face knowing the sins you've committed, and wondering how you could ever fit in with this crowd of saints. And God's spirit broods above you, above the chaos, above the slime. And as the water is placed on your head, God once again reenacts the creation of the world, making order from chaos once again and you begin to take shape and form and beauty in a new way. And instead of hearing God say, "Let there be light," or, "You are my child, the beloved, with you I am well pleased," you hear, "You have been sealed by the Holy Spirit in baptism and marked as Christ's own forever." And God's grace is revealed to the world once again. Hear the good news:

In the beginning, when God began work on you, your being was a formless void, and darkness covered the length and breadth of your soul, while a wind from God swept over the surface of your soul. Then God said, "Let there be life"; and there was life. And God saw that your life was good; and God separated your life from death. God called your life hope, and your darkness he called despair. And there was an up and there was a down, the first day.

In the beginning, your life was a mess. It may not have felt that way, but it was, because they all are. Some peoples' lives are, or were, more chaotic than others, but there's no sense in making comparisons. So it matters little if you were baptized as an infant, a teenager, or an adult. Maybe the only chaos you've ever know was in puberty, but there's still life to live, and you may still go through, will

still go through, a chaotic time. And God will bring shape and form and beauty out of that chaos. That's what God does in Jesus Christ. That is the promise of grace revealed in Jesus' baptism. There will be plenty of chaos to come for Jesus, chaos, and even extraordinary pain and suffering that most of us will never know, and yet, God makes something wonderful out of it, in that wonderful, ironic way we call the day of Jesus' death "Good" Friday. Even in the midst of life and hope, there will be some despair, some downtimes, some suffering. Even though God saw that the light was good, that did not spell the end of darkness. It was simply put in its proper place. Baptism is as much a symbol that God is still creating order from chaos as much as it is that God has already created order from chaos.

Christ was there at the beginning, and Christ was there for your baptism. Creation was baptized with light, and you with water, but both with baptized by the Holy Spirit. Neither you nor the slime had to do anything to merit the gift, but both received it. Both have been seen by God and called "good." We pastors like to say "Remember your baptism" and what we mean by that is remember it even if you can't remember it, even if you cried all the way through it, or slept all the way through it, or looked like a well-groomed poodle all the way through it. It means recalling the grace that has kept you from finding rock-bottom if you've never been there, and giving thanks. It means when faced with temptation, you recall there's a reason to do the right thing. It means living in the confidence that you are loved by God and that no amount of chaos can take that away. It means that God

can always do a new thing and bring order out of chaos, something out of slime. On the day when we remember Jesus' baptism, remember your own baptism as well, and give thanks for the grace that brought the world into being, Christ into our midst, and order to the chaos of our lives. Amen.