

**Sermon for Sunday, September 17, 2023**  
**Sixteenth Sunday after Pentecost**  
**“New Creation Through the Waters”**  
**Reverend Amy Zalk Larson**  
**Good Shepherd Lutheran Church**  
**Decorah, Iowa**

Exodus 14:19-31: [Click here to read the story for today.](#)

Beloved People of God, grace to you and peace in the name of Jesus.

It helps sometimes to go back to the beginning, to the very start of the story. In the beginning, there was only chaos. The earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep. Nothing could flourish or grow. Chaos is full of energy and creative potential, but when it has free reign, there isn't room for life. That's how things feel for each of us, for our world, sometimes - like chaos is taking up all the space, and there's no chance to catch your breath before another wave hits. That's how life in Pharaoh's Egypt must have felt. That's how it was in the beginning of everything, when chaos was uncontained.

Then God began to create.

God's spirit, the mighty wind, moved over the waters.

God's Spirit breathed over the chaos, making space for creation to move and breathe.

God created light when there was only darkness.

God divided water from water, putting each in its place.

God gathered the waters of the earth to reveal dry land.

God harnessed the power of chaos.

There was room for creation. Life could flourish in abundance, for a while at least.

Eventually, chaos runs amok again and again. This happens in Egypt under Pharaoh. His reign of terror, his greed and grasping, violence and pride, and his hardened heart unleash all the forces of chaos. Creation can't flourish in such a place. There is no room to breathe, no space for life. God has promised to bless Israel, and through Israel, all the peoples of the earth. Pharaoh is threatening all of that.

So, God takes a stand for creation. God harnesses the power of chaos, hurling it against Pharaoh in the form of plagues until finally Pharaoh relents and lets the people go. Except, Pharaoh can't actually let go of his grasping, warmongering, death dealing ways. He pursues the Israelites to the banks of the Red Sea. They're caught between the Egyptians and the frightening, chaotic waters.

It's time for God to recreate the world. God again makes light in the darkness, and once again separates the light from the darkness. God's Spirit, the mighty wind-breath of God, begins to blow. By this fierce wind, God rearranges the sea, divides waters, and reveals dry land. The Exodus, the path out of slavery and into freedom, is a new creation. The waters are harnessed. They become walls to protect the people from the chaos and death of the sea. God makes a way, a space, for the people to begin to flourish again. God works through the creation - through Moses, through the sea and the dry land - to make abundant life possible again.

Yet this new beginning is also the end of an old order. Pharaoh leads his army to a watery grave.

This is a powerful, beautiful, troubling story, the stuff of legends and movies. It raises so many questions. It also helps us visualize how God works in our own lives. We all need new beginnings, time and again. Chaos runs amok within us. Like Pharaoh, we're plagued by our own grasping and fear, violence and pride. Like the Israelites, we are not free. *We are captive to sin and cannot free ourselves.* We need to be re-created over and over.

So, God brings us back to the beginning, again and again, back to the waters of baptism. In baptism, God again works through creation - through water and words and human beings - to make a new beginning. God's Spirit moves over the waters to provide space for each of us to become a new creation as we are united to the death and resurrection of Jesus and made a part of the people of God. We enter the waters and our sinful selves are drowned, like Pharaoh's army. We rise again. The Spirit enters us so that we can move and breathe in newness of life. A candle is lit, light for the darkness. Together, we move forward into freedom like the Israelites.

Throughout scripture, the Israelites often forget what God has done for them in the Exodus. God needed to remind them repeatedly: I led you through the waters and made you a new creation. God knows we also need regular reminders of our baptism. There is so much chaos within and around us, voices telling us our worth depends on how well we compete, how much we can consume, forces that captivate us, that lead us to grasp and be grasped, fears and worries threaten to overwhelm us.

All those voices are drowned out by the baptismal declaration: *Child of God, you have been sealed by the Holy Spirit and marked with the cross of Christ forever. You are God's beloved child. You are a new creation.* God works through water and fire and words to remind us of this again and again. Our chaos is put in its place. We can breathe again. We can live as God's people, trusting God is working through us to re-create and renew the face of the earth.

Now let's join in a prayer from the service of Holy Baptism.

*We give you thanks, O God, for in the beginning your Spirit moved over the waters and by your Word you created the world, calling forth life in which you took delight. Through the waters of the flood you delivered Noah and his family, and through the sea you led your people Israel from slavery into freedom. At the river your Son was baptized by John and anointed with the Holy Spirit. By the baptism of Jesus' death and resurrection you set us free from the power of sin and death and raise us up to live in you. Pour out your Holy Spirit, the power of your living Word, that all who are washed in th/e waters of baptism may be given new life. To you be given honor and praise through Jesus Christ our Lord, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, now and forever. Amen.*