

*At least somebody had a good week.* That's the response I got a few days ago when I was talking with people in recovery from addiction. They said, *At least somebody had a good week* - because no one in that room who had just began recovery was having a good week. Almost by definition, their lives had become chaos before they began intensive treatment for recovery.

And because their lives have reached a kind of chaos, whenever I visit people beginning intensive recovery I usually talk about the creation story from Genesis. The creation story begins in chaos. It begins with the God's Spirit hovering over a watery chaos. One of the things we discuss with people in recovery is that sometimes, God does some of God's best creative work in the midst chaos. For people beginning their recovery and desperate for structure & hope to rebuild their lives we discuss the patterns & rhythms of creation that grow out of chaos. We discuss the patterns & rhythms of creation that surround us still today. Because whether or not we're paying attention to the world around us, the cycles and seasons of creation keep spinning around us - and within us - almost like an invitation to find our pace & our rhythm in the patterns of life in creation.

The more we look, the more we find. The more we explore, the more we discover about finding our pace & our rhythm in creation. Scientists can't get enough of this, right? Scientists are the ones who send satellites & probes plunging to the depths of the ocean or racing into outer space. They can't get enough; exploring and unpacking the patterns & rhythms of creation. And this week, NASA

had a very good week. This week, “After five years hurtling through space, NASA’s Juno probe slipped into orbit around Jupiter, the biggest, oldest planet in our cosmic neighborhood,” in order to, “help us understand how our solar system and all its planets and even life itself came to be.”<sup>1</sup>

After 5 years in space, hurtling through our solar system at thousands of mph, this satellite “entered its orbit within one centimeter of the target, just one second later than the moment NASA had aimed for”<sup>2</sup> five years ago. Incredible. NASA had a very good week. *At least somebody had a good week.*

Because even if none of us entered intensive recovery this week - and I hope none of you did; even if none of us entered a hospital for serious illness or injury this week - as maybe some of you have; even if none of us were victims of violence in Louisiana, Minnesota, or Dallas this week; even if we’re the “lucky ones” who didn’t suffer any tragedies this week - we all come face-to-face with some kind of chaos during the week. Even if we’re not the victims of illness, violence, or tragedy, sometimes the chaos in our lives just keeps piling on.

Sometimes even following Jesus - let alone, acting like a good person - feels as challenging or complicated as trying to fly a satellite to a planet millions of miles away. We live in a world that seems to have been born from chaos, and we still carry some of that chaos with us and in us. And in the midst of this world’s

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/speaking-of-science/wp/2016/07/05/why-scientists-are-so-excited-about-the-juno-probe-that-is-finally-orbiting-jupiter/>

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

chaos, today's readings invite us to become a people of hope; they invite us to become part of God's new creation in world so often plagued with violence & chaos. Today's readings are inviting us to see that even in the midst of this world's chaos, God is near us, God is with us, God loves us, and our lives are created to bear fruit - good fruit - whatever chaos we encounter during the week. Today's readings are inviting us to become people of hope.

The central story is, of course, the story of the Good Samaritan; one of the most famous stories in Scripture. It begins as a friendly debate between Jesus and a scholar. The scholar asks, "what must I *do* to inherit eternal life?" What must I *do* to enter the realm of God's life, both now and in the future? What's necessary or needful; what must I *do*? And Jesus responds to the man's question with his own question. He simply asks the man: "What do you know? What have you already been taught?" You see, Jesus is basically reworking our first reading from Deuteronomy, when Moses tells the people: *Surely, this commandment ...is not too hard for you, nor is it too far away. It is not in heaven, that you should say, "Who will go up to heaven for us...[It's not] beyond the sea, that you should say, "Who will cross to the other side ..."* No, the word [of God] is very near to you; it is [already] in your mouth and in your heart for you to observe. (Deut 30:11-14). God's hope is already in your reach. That's how today's Gospel story begins; that God's light & life is near us.

The message we hear is that life with God is not rocket science. It isn't

complicated or hard to attain. It's not like trying to fly a satellite to some planet millions of miles away. Odds are, we already know what to do. The Gospel begins with Jesus saying, "Great! You're all set! So go and *do* it - and you will live." But that's also the catch. In a world of chaos "Quite often, what [God] requires is [already] clear; but the cost is also clear, and so we ask...more questions"<sup>3</sup> to limit our exposure. In a world of chaos knowing what to do is often crystal clear: love God, love neighbor. But in a world of chaos the cost is also clear. Sometimes we feel threatened or overwhelmed by the world's chaos. And that's where we run into trouble. That's where this scholar runs into trouble - wanting to limit his exposure in a world of chaos. So "he asked Jesus, 'And who is my neighbor?'"

Jesus responds with a story that most of us already know. It's a story about about a traveler who gets ambushed, mugged and left for dead on the side of the road. Three other travelers pass by. The first two are clergy – a priest and a Levite. Both clergy see this guy lying there; they both *see* him but then continue on their way. We don't know why but it doesn't really matter. The bottom line is they want to limit their exposure, to not be overwhelmed in a world of chaos. The third traveler is a good-for-nothing Samaritan. And the one thing you *must* remember is that Jesus himself was just rejected by a village of Samaritans a few verses before this story (Luke 9.52f). Jesus was rejected, not shown any hospitality, because they didn't like where he was going. Jesus is traveling to Jerusalem - and Samaritans,

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<sup>3</sup> Gonzalez, *Luke*, 138.