

# God at the Bottom of the Pool

*B Epiphany 1--Genesis 1:1-5*

Towards the beginning of the 1967 film, *The Graduate*, there is this scene in which Dustin Hoffman's character is sitting at the bottom of his parents' pool. He has just graduated from college. The adults in his life keep pressuring him to take some action, to make a lucrative future for himself in the business of plastics, to go on dates, to meet the expectations of the well-heeled society in which he has been raised. But Hoffman's character is completely at a loss. He seems clearly unexcited by the prospects of this well-trodden future, but he has no other passion with which to replace it. So he takes the new scuba equipment that was given to him for his graduation and settles at the bottom of his parents' pool. Down there, everything is slow and quiet. There's no one he has to talk to, nothing to do. Every once in a while, the bubbles from his breathing apparatus mushroom up in front of his mask, and he just floats there for hours, suspended in a kind of brilliant blue nothingness while the world of his parents passes by above the surface.

To me, this scene captures the emotional quality of the first two verses of Genesis, before God begins to create by calling forth light. The empty stuff from which creation will spring has no sense of this future. It just is. A formless void, a darkness, a deep, impassive substance barely ruffled by the winds that sweep across its surface. It is like a state of depression. Like a state of despair. Like a college graduate with no plan and no passion, sitting at the bottom of a pool.

And really, this state is not so hard for us to relate to, is it? Oh, it may have come on in our lives through different circumstances, but haven't we all known, at one point or another, this terrible void, this sense of being lost and directionless and numb with inertia? Anyone who has suffered from depression or addiction has known it. Anyone who has struggled with illness, or despaired over the purpose of his or her life, or faced the loss of a job or a loved one knows this state of

flatness in which time crawls by and nothing changes. Some of us may be there now, living as we are in the midst of dwindling pensions and mounting unemployment, on top of whatever dark angels we may wrestle with personally.

Having raised this emotional state, at least metaphorically, how does our passage in Genesis address it? What does our text have to say about it? Well, most obviously, being a creation account, the passage promises that a state of nothingness and desolation will not last. There will be light. There will be day and night and earth and sea and creatures and a profusion of life. There will be passion and direction, energy and joy.

And really, this claim has a powerful credibility when you think that it was written by the Israelites during one of the hardest times in their history: the exile in Babylon, when they had been conquered, lost their land and their temple, and their whole world was turned upside down. These were a people who knew darkness. These were a people who knew the deep waters of despair and the formless void of a hope-impooverished future. Yet they didn't just give in. They didn't just accept the creation account of their captors, which asserted that the Babylonian god, Marduk, had defeated all other gods and had used their corpses to fashion the world and the human race. Instead, the writers of Genesis 1 did a remarkable thing. They took this Babylonian creation account and subverted it. They rewrote it to reflect their own stubborn faith that there is only one God, that this God is good, and that this God takes delight in creation. Despite their own violent defeat, the Israelites insisted that the world was not generated through violence but through the regal creativity of God. Despite their hopeless situation, they held firm to a belief in this immense, mysterious urge that defines the very nature of God: to create and to renew.

So there is new life. There is renewal and rebirth, even out of the most desolate of circumstances. That is Genesis' most explicit promise. But Genesis makes another promise, more implicit but every bit as profound as this one. That promise is that even before creation, even before any hint that anything is going to change, even then, God is present. This is very important: God doesn't strut onto the scene just as the long night is ending, rolling up God's sleeves to get to work. God doesn't just show up for the fun stuff. God doesn't take a pass on the time of stillness and desolation. No, God is already there, breathing the wind that sweeps over the deep, one with

the darkness and the waiting.

And that alone is something. Because sometimes our lives are like that emptiness. We lose sight of so much that even God's promise of future light, of new creation, is not enough. We stop believing it. Sometimes our lives are like darkness and deep waters, without any sense of hope--like the Israelites in Babylon, like the graduate in his parents' pool. We are just waiting. And yet even in the waiting, the interminable in-between, God finds us. God is always, already present, always, already with us. I think the psalmist puts it best when he addresses God:

Where can I go from your spirit?

Or where can I flee from your presence?

If I ascend to heaven, you are there;

if I make my bed in Sheol, you are there.

If I take the wings of the morning

and settle at the farthest limits of the sea,

even there your hand shall lead me,

and your right hand shall hold me fast.

Amen.