

Water and Light

Genesis 1: 1-5 Mark 1: 4-11

How many of you know who Elon Musk is? He is often compared to Steve Jobs as a risk-taking, no-nonsense innovator. Actually, Elon Musk's endeavors make Steve Jobs' ambitions seem puny.

Jobs co-founded the most successful computer company, indeed perhaps the most successful company ever, in Apple. He also has the notoriety of having been fired by Apple, and then later reunited when Apple bought the new computer company Jobs founded, *Next*, bringing Jobs back to the leading role. That's all quite impressive by any standard.

Elon Musk, born in South Africa, and his brother would create a company that produced travel guide computer programs. When sold to Compaq Computers, it made him \$22 million. Then he co-created Paypal, which would be purchased by eBay, netting Musk about \$165 million. Paypal remains the standard for electronic payments in the online marketplace.

With almost \$200 million, Musk had a huge amount of money. What do you do with a huge amount of money? Elon Musk decided to tackle the biggest problems he saw facing humanity. Yes, when you have \$200 million, you really can think very, **very** big, **if you want to**.

Musk felt that the planet's habitability for humans depended on finding an alternative to fossil fuels, particularly for transportation. He pursued two directions.

First, he got partners and founded Tesla to produce 100% electric cars. There was an article in last week's local paper about Teslas, inspired by a charging station (like a gas station, but for electricity) that Tesla opened on Hwy 200 next to Mimi's Café. Teslas are a bit pricey but they prove that electric power is far better than any fossil fuel. A Tesla can accelerate from 0-60 in about 4 seconds thanks to an over 400 HP engine; it's virtually impossible to flip because of the heavy batteries; it gets the equivalent of about 90 mpg, and with advanced computer engineering, its handling even in ice and snow is incredible. His 32% ownership stake in Tesla is now worth \$18 billion.

Recently, Tesla got billions in incentives to locate a Giga-factory in Nevada where raw materials will go in one end and finished batteries will come out the other, all while researching and testing for new economies and efficiencies and capabilities in the critical field of energy storage.

Second, his pursuit of an alternative to fossil fuels drew him to the natural (and I do mean natural) place to find a replacement which sits in the sky every day – the sun. Solar panels and photovoltaic technology are simple and functional, with costs improving constantly so that now it's directly competitive with fossil-fuel generated electricity.

The problem is the initial cost. The problem is **not** technology; it is **financing**. Musk developed Solar City, a company to lease solar electric systems to homes, but primarily to businesses. The lease is repaid typically in 10 years and will cost less than what the utility bills would be. After ten years, all the savings is yours. And the public utility monopolies? Too bad.

Solar City is now planning to produce its own solar systems at a plant in Buffalo, and also plans to use batteries from Tesla's Giga-factory to help their solar systems.

One more thing for Musk. The other great thing that humanity needs to address is interplanetary space travel. Musk believes that he will be able to travel to Mars in 10-20 years, and would ideally like to see a colony established there. To that end, Musk founded SpaceX with \$100 million from his \$165 million Paypal payout.

Musk's SpaceX was nearly out of business when it finally landed a contract with NASA to ferry supplies to the International Space Station. He has continued to develop SpaceX with an aim of reducing the billion dollar cost of space travel. The biggest costs, he found, were with the rockets which had always been "disposable" until the space shuttle, and even then were only partially reused and at huge costs. Musk wanted not only to recover but *immediately* reuse entire rockets. SpaceX has already tested a rocket that can blast off, hover, and land, and tested the rocket with re-entry through the atmosphere to a slowed, precision splashdown where a floating landing platform will be in the future.

Elon Musk is 43, and really, he's just getting started.

I've gone on at length about him because he has the unique distinction of bringing **disruptive new models** to three industries; automotive design, space travel, and alternative energy systems. It is one thing to make something like everyone else is making it, or adding features to make it somewhat better. It's entirely another matter to disrupt an entire industry with innovation and create a whole new way of doing business. Disruptors take whatever had been, what's been normal and standard, and transform them by establishing new models, new standards, and a new ordering of priorities and process.

The greatest disruptor of all is the Creator. God disrupts the order and standards of things routinely. I don't mean by the performance of miracles because, while that may be exceptional, it is not a permanent disruption. God disrupts and we spend great amounts of energy, time, and resources denying it. We even pray for God to disrupt on one hand, and then on the other we insist that God not disrupt, keep things the same – in order, undisturbed, and secure. Whole theologies have been designed to insist that God is unchanging, functions only in precise, certain ways, and that God agrees with us and affirms all that we know to be good, true, and beautiful.

In truth, God defies our systematic theologies, our convenient compartments of theological definition, and our expectations of divine conduct. God's disruptiveness

seems deliberately suppressed by the faithful who covet tradition, order, stability, and security.

When God created the heavens and the earth, a dark and formless void, defined by watery chaos came into existence. Amid this primordial clash of striving waters, we hear that *the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters*. God's aims for this creation will not advance without God's active intervention to shape the outcomes that God desires.

Let there be light ... and God saw that the light was good. There would still be darkness, but now it would share its existence with light. Light gave darkness function and purpose within God's creation plan, forming the twin orientations of day and night, allowing activity and rest for different beings (coming) in the creation. God comes into the world in creation's beginning to establish God's own plans and purposes at that time. The creation is authored to fulfill God's ambition, not for any other purpose. God disrupts the chaos to bring about God's promise for life and for goodness.

In the beginning of every faith story, there is God, working, doing whatever God wants, and often not what people want. God shapes the contours to suit God's purpose and promise.

In this season of Epiphany, the time of awareness that God has acted, that God has come, and indeed that God is revealed as being at the work of disrupting things **again**, our texts turn to the beginning of the gospel as well as the beginning of God's creation. This, too, is God's new creation, God's disruption, Jesus coming into the world; Jesus, the Son of God.

Again, there is no nativity story in Mark. Mark is the oldest of the gospels; its final form was likely reached well before the Roman War in 66 CE which would bring about the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple. Mark begins: *The beginning of the gospel (good news) about Jesus Christ, the Son of God.*

For Mark, the gospel begins with a quotation from the prophet Isaiah that Mark sees as a reference to the role of John the Baptist, the first figure in the account of the gospel of God's disruption of the established order. The text in Isaiah talks of a messenger sent to prepare the way. This is really quite thoughtful, sending ahead one to prepare the way for the God-created disruption that is coming, the way of the Lord.

As you know, John the Baptist is plenty disruptive in his own right, causing a stir in the cities and towns, bringing together people who seek what the Temple in Jerusalem no longer seems to provide. Perhaps they have been excluded, or the trust that the Temple served God's purpose for God's people had been so compromised by the Roman occupation that new paths, truer paths, were being sought out. John the Baptist will be sufficiently disruptive to eventually bring about a persecution that takes his life.

Yet John is awaiting the One from God who will disrupt the worldly order of things, the one who baptizes not simply with water, but with the Holy Spirit of God. The

power of his way and his words will bring about a spiritual power that John himself dares not fathom.

Then Jesus appears, gets baptized by John, and the disruption of God's authorship becomes evident. The text in Mark describes the waters of heaven parting, literally *being torn open*, it says. The Spirit of God descends upon Jesus and the words come from the voice of heaven: *You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.*

In both stories, we hear about water and we hear about light. These are the elements of God's creative action, of God's disruption of what had been with the new creation of God's purpose and the presentation of God's promise. Water and light combine together in our common experience to form the rainbow, the sign of God's promise and commitment to the creation that came as a sign for Noah and for all generations.

The great mistake that we make in the church is to rest in the belief that God created, and it was done, and it all remains stable and secure, forming the church into a bastion of tradition and predictability and a refuge from the disruptions that we see in the world. Today I'd like to remind you that God's house is in fact the launching point for the faithful to engage in faithful witness with the disruption that God is unleashing, calling us to change. We come to connect to the new shape of God's promise in our time, to participate in the disruption that God seeks in his creation.

Those who turned their backs on the great Temple in order to go into the wilderness and see what God was doing through John the Baptist, they expected God's disruption and wanted to participate in it. The ones who stayed wedded to the Temple, who rationalized the compromises with Roman authority, who sought to keep the house of God functioning the way it always had, denied that the promise of God could be anywhere else.

God may even bring disruptions to your own life. In the chaos and churn, God is doing a new thing, bringing God's Spirit in a new way, re-shaping your boundaries of faithfulness. God is revealing the word that holds the promise, the same promise of peace, justice, goodness, and new life, the same word, but in a new character and dimension that disrupts and opens new doors to the Kingdom for each one.

May we appreciate God's dynamism and resist the urge to define God and his way by what we've always known. God is sure to disrupt that confidence, but will scramble things in order to bring the rainbow again, calling for a new, vital witness to the ancient promise of our Lord and Savior.