Since I have been on vacation in California, today’s sermon might be a little wacky. Not in a “I spent too much time on Telegraph Avenue in Berkeley” kind of way but more in a “I am not sure if it is really a sermon” kind of way. Instead, it might be more of a teaching moment or perhaps a talk about something foundational in our understanding of Christianity. Whatever the case, hopefully when I am done you know a little more about the Christian Faith and it helps you on your faith journey. If not come back next week and I promise to give a more conventional sermon about not coveting your neighbor’s mule or some such thing. So, with that disclaimer out of the way let’s descend into a little wackiness.

Today is the first Sunday after the Epiphany and we have a reading from the very beginning of Genesis. In part this passage reads, “In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters.” It is one of the more famous passages in the Bible. Maybe not as famous as the next sentence which includes the phrase, “Let there be light” but it is more famous than something like the part of Deuteronomy which tells us that, “the elders of that city shall bring the heifer down to a valley with running water.” However, there can be a problem with familiarity because it may cause us to miss something of what are being told.

When we read “In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth” there is something that is implied even though it is not explicitly stated. And the thing that is implied is that God was not a part of the “in the beginning” phase rather God was there before “the beginning.” Put another way he did the creating but is not part of the creation. For a bad analogy it is like me saying, “this morning I made toast.” In this example no one would think that I was made at the same time my toast was made. Rather, one would assume that I was a given in the story and that I existed before my toast. And while I realize this may not be the most exciting of discussions, it tells us something very essential about what we believe and what we believe is that God always was. The creation story tells us that at some point God brought everything we know into being out of nothing. If you want a good Church phrase, we believe that God created *ex nihilio,* which, of course just means out of nothing. And what this means is everything, including existence itself comes from God. God is not a result of creation but is rather the cause of creation.

In the Book of Exodus when God told Moses to go to the people of Israel, Moses asks him what to say if he is asked the name of the God who sent him. To this question God replies, “Say this to the people of Israel, ‘I am has sent me to you.” It may sound like God is avoiding the question Moses has posed but that is not the case. He is instead telling Moses something about his nature. In this small phrase, God is saying that He is not a god like we humans make up. The gods of paganism have names like Apollo and Thor but our God simply is and he is the reason everything else is.

The German philosopher and Nazi lickspittle Martin Heidegger famously said, “The question is not what there is but that there is.” In other words we should ask why things exist at all. Heidegger never really got around to satisfactorily answering his own question partly because he was an atheist and tried to do theology without God. Which strangely, or maybe not so strangely, led him to become the philosophical equivalent of a Disney Princess, telling the world that we need to follow our heart. But as much fun as Heidegger bashing is I want to get back to his question about why anything actually exists because it is a very good question. So much of our discussions about God assume that there is existence and never bother with the actual miracle of existence. We spend our time debating whether or not God is doing a good job running the universe rather than pondering why there is a universe at all. Now I realize that up to this point this sermon has been pretty esoteric but if you have stuck with me this long give me a few more minutes because I think there is something to be gained by thinking of God as the one whose existence gives existence to all things. And if you want, we can even make it into a New Year’s resolution.

So here we go. As I said we tend to think of God as part of the world and judge His goodness and even His existence based on how things go here on earth. If things go in ways we like then we let God exist and may even conclude that God is good. However, if too many things go wrong or we see too many things we think are bad then we conclude that God is unhelpful, unimportant or simply does not exist. But that is far too small of a way to look at God and that is where I want to get into the New Year’s resolution part. In this new year it would be good to constantly remind ourselves of the greatness and vastness of God. God is not just like us with some super powers thrown in. Rather, God is the reason we have anything. And by anything I mean everything, right down to the ability to know that we are here and the ability to decide what is good and bad, right and wrong. In this new year, it would be good not to evaluate God using the same criteria that we use to judge a pair of pants. Because if we judge God in this manner, we make Him very small. For remember back to Exodus when God tells Moses who he is he tells him that is “I am”. In other words he is existence itself and is not dependent on anything. And that is kind of a big deal. For it is when we have that kind of understanding of God that we begin to have a proper relationship with God. Our consumerist society evaluates everything using one simple criteria – what can it do for me? And this has of course spilled over into our understanding of religion in general. But if God is above existence he is also above our evaluations. For when we evaluate God, we act like spoiled brats, feeling entitled to everything. However, when we realize that everything we have is only possible because of the phrase, “In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth” then we start to acknowledge that we owe everything to Him. And so in this New Year maybe we should try to be the opposite of being a spoiled brat by being grateful; grateful because we know that we are not entitled to anything including existence itself. So in my meandering roundabout way that is what I want to get at today. To paraphrase Heidegger we should be grateful not just for what there is but above all should be grateful that there is. We should thank God for our lives and for the lives of those we know and love.

The opening of the Bible lets us know that we are not simply talking about a god who can do some things a little better than us but rather we are talking about a God who is. A God who through his is-ness has given us life and consciousness and everything else that we can think of. So, as we begin the year it might be a good time to resolve to be thankful. Thankful in a first chapter of Genesis type way. Not for things going our way or getting the stuff we want but for creation itself so that we may be God’s own this day and forevermore.