

Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan, to be baptized by him. John would have prevented Jesus, saying, "I need to be baptized by You, and do You come to me?" But Jesus answered him, "Let it be so now; for it is proper for us in this way to fulfill all righteousness." Then John consented. And when Jesus had been baptized, just as He came up from the water, suddenly the heavens were opened to Him and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on Him. And a voice from heaven said, "This is My Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased." Matthew 3:13-17

As I worked on my sermon for this morning, I realized that I felt verklempt (which is to be overcome) that we get to hear God's word together. We get to listen to it, and be drawn into it, and be amazed by it. This is probably what I love most about being the church: that we come together, diverse people, unique personal experience, different knowledge of God, and we hear God's story together, and we look together, for what the story tells us about God, and about ourselves. I love this, and I see it as an amazing gift that God has given us. Pretty much wherever you go in the world you can find a community of the Body of Christ; people who gather together to listen to God's story. I just want to pause and be mindful of the gift it is for us to gather here, together. Thank You, God. Let's say it together: Thank You, God!

Sometimes scripture tells the story so clearly and completely that the preacher doesn't need to add very much. This scripture from Matthew's gospel is such a story. The baptism of the Lord is a revelation - which means something is clearly communicated or disclosed - of who Jesus was. "Revelation" is the word today, and last Sunday it was "Epiphany" (which also means revelation.) At Christmas God's design to live as one of us and share this human life was revealed... and when the magi followed the star that led them to the Christ-child it was another revelation that God's love and

salvation was not for a select people but for all the world. And today, in the waters of the Jordan River, for the first time in God's story, all the aspects or "persons" of God - the Father, the Creator of all that is; the Son, the hope and Redeemer of all the world; and the Holy Spirit, the unseen Sustaining Presence of God - are together, revealed. And Jesus is revealed as fully human and fully divine.

Jesus, the Messiah, came to the Jordan River to be anointed, like all the kings before Him were anointed. Jesus, the man, came to the Jordan River to be baptized as all sinners are baptized, to be washed clean in the waters of God's love and mercy. As God with flesh on, Jesus was sinless, and so not like us... and yet He took on our skin, and in solidarity with us, was submerged in the waters of baptism. As He rose out of the water Jesus saw the Spirit of God, descending like a dove and lighting on Him, and He heard the voice of God, say, "This is My Son, the beloved... in whom I am well pleased." Eugene Peterson's "The Message" translation of God's voice is: "This is My Son, chosen and marked by My love, delight of My life."

In Jesus' baptism, God, in all God's fullness - Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer - is revealed. This is a revelation, and epiphany, and it's appropriate for us to be amazed and grateful that we've heard it. Let's say it again: Thank You, God! And if what we take from this story of Jesus' baptism is the gloriousness and beauty of God revealed... in Jesus, Emmanuel, God-with-us, rising up out of the water, His mouth open to catch His breath, His skin dripping with water; in the Holy Spirit, the likeness of a dove fluttering from heaven; and in the very Voice that spoke all creation into being... that is enough. But there is still more to be revealed.

Two summers ago I baptized our young friend Eric, who was 25 then. United Methodists - and most Protestants - don't do "rebaptisms." Some people want a rebaptism with every epiphany of God... every mountaintop, and every revelation, every prodigal-son-experience, as a way to mark the occasion. We don't rebaptize because we believe that baptism "takes" the first time. Baptism is a ritual where the physical and the spiritual realms meet and God is present, welcoming and confirming us as God's own, God's beloved.

Eric hadn't been baptized... his mother was waiting for her husband to get sober, and for her house to look put together, and for just the right time... and it never came until two summers ago. There are about 200 of us at Family Camp, and we sat around the edges of the swimming pool that night, just before campfire, and dangled our feet in the water. Eric and I got into the pool, and after he confessed his sin, and his desire to follow Jesus, I lowered him into the water and raised him up to live a new life. It was probably the first time I thought "I wish we didn't baptize babies" because they have no story of their own of the waters closing over them, and the pastor pulling them up, and the water steaming from their faces. They have no "Baptism in the Jordan River" experience.

Jesus' public ministry began when He was baptized at the age of thirty, and it was over when He was crucified at the age of thirty-three. There aren't a lot of "Baptism in the Jordan River" experiences of His recorded in the gospels. Most of the Jesus-stories are about His encounters with outcasts and sinners, His compassion for the poor and the suffering, his tender touch on the sick and the dying, and His disregard of scripture when it hurt - and didn't serve - people. The "Baptism in the River Jordan"

experience seems to be a rare one for Jesus: that intimate, confirming, revealing, encounter between God the Creator, God the Redeemer, and God the Spirit. On the cross Jesus would cry out for that confirming Presence, would sob in physical and spiritual anguish, “My God, my God, why have You forsaken Me?”

I think Jesus, the man, needed that intimate, confirming, revealing encounter with God, just as we, His brothers and sisters, need “Jordan River” experiences. We need to hear and see and feel the Presence of God. Knowing about God isn’t enough... we need to experience God, and know that God sees and hears and intimately knows us. It’s those moments of spiritual revelation and epiphany that make the millions of other mundane or painful moments of life bearable, because we remember the “Jordan River” experiences... those intimate, confirming, revealing encounters with God.

Today we reaffirm our baptism; we remake the promises that were made over this sacred water when we were babies, confirmed as teenagers, or baptized as adults. Today remember that God was fully present when Jesus was baptized in the waters of the Jordan River, just as God was fully present with you in your baptism. Today remember that Jesus was recognized, in those waters, as God’s beloved: chosen and marked by God’s love, the delight of God’s life. And as Jesus’ sisters and brothers, you too are chosen and marked by God’s love, the delight of God’s life. When you reaffirm your baptismal covenant with God, when your hands touch the baptismal waters, trust that you will meet God here; that God is fully present to you.

Two summers ago when my young friend Eric rose out of the chlorinated baptismal waters of the Family Camp swimming pool, it was to live a new life in Christ, to live as a new creation. Living that new life and becoming that new creation takes your

whole life long. The only way to keep at it (or more accurately to let God keep at it in you) is to trust that God is doing God's work, and to remember that God is fully present to you in this new life. Eric is now 27, and both of his parents are dead. He struggles a lot... and I pray that his "Jordan River/Swimming Pool" experience reminds him that God was and is fully present to him in this new life.

One of the gifts we give each other when we gather together is that we remember together... that Jesus was baptized as we are... that God was fully present to Him as God is fully present to us... and that God has claimed each one of us, as God claimed Jesus as: "My Child, chosen and marked by My love, delight of My life." Thank You, thank You, God. Let's say it together: Thank You, God!

To remember, to reclaim, and rejoice in God's covenant love for you, I invite you to reaffirm your baptism vows, and then to come to the waters and give thanks. Please join me on page three of the bulletin.

Reaffirming the Sacrament of Our Baptism

Pastor: Sisters and brothers in Christ: through the sacrament of baptism God's Spirit has been poured out upon water, water poured over and immersing us, water that flows freely for all who will receive it, water from the streams of God's saving power and justice, water that brings hope to all who thirst for righteousness, water that refreshes life, nurtures growth, and offers new birth.

Today we come to the waters, to renew our commitments in each other's presence to Christ who has raised us, the Spirit who has birthed us, and the Creator who is making all things new.

And so I ask you, will you turn away from the powers of sin and death?

**Everyone: I renounce the spiritual forces
of wickedness,
Reject the evil powers of this world,
And repent of my sin.**

Pastor: Will you let the Spirit use you as prophets to the powers that be?

**Everyone: I accept the freedom and power God gives me
to resist evil, injustice, and oppression
in whatever forms they present themselves!**

Pastor: Will you proclaim the good news and live as disciples of Jesus Christ, His body on earth?

**Everyone: I confess Jesus Christ as my Savior,
put my whole trust in His grace,
and promise to serve Him as my Lord,
in union with the church
which Christ has opened to all people.**

Pastor: Will you be living witnesses to the gospel, individually and together, wherever you are, and in all that you do?

Everyone: We will remain faithful members of Christ's holy church and serve as His representatives in the world.

Pastor: Do you receive and profess the Christian faith revealed in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments?

**Everyone: We affirm the faith revealed in the Scriptures
and we put our trust in God, the Creator,
in Jesus Christ, our Redeemer,
and in the Holy Spirit, the Sustainer,
one God now and forever.**

Pastor: Almighty God, the life You birthed in us by baptism into Jesus Christ will never die. Your justice never fails. Your mercy is everlasting.

**Everyone: Your healing river flows.
Your Spirit blows where You will.
We cannot stop You, God!**

Pastor: But sometimes we try. We try to block the flow, we redirect the winds of the Spirit, or we walk so far away from Your life-giving stream that we do not hear its sound, and we forget its power. We parch ourselves.

**Everyone: We are dry and thirsty, O God.
Come, refresh us!**

Pastor: Come upon us, Holy Spirit!

Everyone: Come upon us, Holy Spirit!

Pastor: Come upon these waters!

Everyone: Come upon these waters!

Pastor: Let these waters be to us drops of Your mercy.

**Everyone: Let these waters remind us
of Your righteousness and justice.**

Pastor: Let these waters renew in us the resurrection power of Jesus.

**Everyone: Let these waters make us long
for Your coming reign.**

Pastor: Most Holy God, Abba, Father!

Everyone: Glory to you!

Pastor: Jesus Christ, Savior, Lord!

Everyone: Glory to you!

Pastor: Spirit of fire, Spirit over the waters, Spirit of holiness!

**Everyone: Glory to you! Almighty God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, all honor and
glory is Yours, now and forever! Amen.**