

January 10, 2021
The Baptism of Christ

“Getting Rid of the Stink”
Sermon by Rev. Susan Drake

Scripture Readings:

Genesis 1:1-5

1 In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, 2 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. 3 Then God said, “Let there be light”; and there was light. 4 And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness. 5 God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day.

Mark 1:4-11

John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. 5 And people from the whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem were going out to him, and were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. 6 Now John was clothed with camel’s hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. 7 He proclaimed, “The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the thong of his sandals. 8 I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.” 9 In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. 10 And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. 11 And a voice came from heaven, “You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.”

Sermon “Getting Rid of the Stink”

We were warned in seminary about titling our sermons early in the week because the minute you do that something is going to happen in the world and those events will need you to go in a different direction. But that wasn’t a problem this week. I turned in this title “Getting Rid of the Stink” on Tuesday and the only thing that has changed is that there is just a whole lot more stink today than there was on Tuesday.

I remember hearing my mother and grandmother using this phrase, “Go take a bath and get the stink off of you”. Sometimes that was meant literally because I was a girl who loved to fish but they would also mean it figuratively, when we were fighting, or pouty or resentful, “acting ugly” they called it.

We were either sent outside to “blow the stink off us”, to the bath to wash it off, or to our rooms to cry it out. So when it came time for me to understand what baptism meant I always thought it

meant to get the stink off of us. Oh how I wish the whole world could have a communal bath right now and do just that.

I have to keep reminding myself that Jesus was surrounded by the stink of humanities grievance, greed, selfishness and short sightedness too. He was mired in a world of constant political upheaval, constant divisions and he certainly preached against injustice but what did he do. He kept on feeding the hungry, loving everybody, reaching out to those who suffer, doing what God called him to do and being who God called him to be.

We can't put blinders on and we have to be working toward a more just world for everyone, we have to keep caring about the poor like he did, the children like he did, the outcast, the sick, the imprisoned, like he did but if we can stay focused on what is the next loving act we can do today, then we will get through this really discouraging time in our history.

When we recover from Wednesday then maybe the Divided States of America can come together and figure out how in the world did Wednesday happen and what in the world can we do to prevent it from happening again.

When the dust settles, and the five people killed in the riot are buried, when the immensely overshadowed 4,000 people who died from the virus that same day are buried maybe the divided States of America can figure out how to start attacking problems rather than each other. Exchanging ideas not hateful tweets and barbs because if Wednesday taught us anything, our words matter, what we do matters and what we don't do matters.

But you don't need to hear a political, social, moral, or ethical treatise on this week's events. There is plenty of that going around. What our trembling hearts need to hear is that God is still with us in this crazy mess. We need to hear that it is going to be okay, that we are still God's beloved even when it feels like we are so far away from God's vision for us.

Both of the scriptures this morning are about the beginning of something awesome. The first is about the birth of the world, that first dawn, the first stirring, the moments when God's imagination started the flow of evolution in a certain direction. Imagine that abject void and emptiness moments before the big bang and the explosion of light and rudimentary elements.

Smell the molten lava of the early earth, and then the steam as water settled in its place. Envision the continents as one, all new, untainted, full of promise. Picture the tracks on the beach of the first creature to come forth from the ocean, hear the first plant bud and unfold, hear the first chirp, smell the first flower.

Then fast forward through another billion years of evolution when a humble man baptized Jesus in the river Jordan. And when Jesus breaks forth through the surface of that water, he comes out of it a new man, fresh and full of promise, ready to serve and born anew.

Now picture yourself in the same way, brand new like those first moments after your birth. Before you became the identity you wear today. Before you became a mother, father, husband, or wife; before you became what you do; a teacher, preacher, nurse or farmer.

Before you became whatever people called you, the smart one or pretty one, the lazy one or hardworking one, the no good one, the one going places. Before you had positions and opinions you had to defend or promote, before you thought of yourself as a Democrat, Republican or Independent. Before you had any axes to grind or grief to bear. Let go of all of it and who are you?

You are God's and even more beautiful you are God's beloved and that's it. No matter what you became after birth, no matter what you did or didn't do, no matter what people called you. This is the first thing you were, it is the one thing that will never change and it will be who you will be the day you die. You are God's beloved.

If you can hold onto that... don't let the news, don't let your anger or betrayal or hurt steal it from you. Don't let someone ever tell you differently and don't tell anyone else any differently. We could heal the world if we saw ourselves like this before all else, and certainly heal the world if this was the first thing we saw in others.

As we reclaim our baptism today. Let the water wash the stink off of us. Let it loosen all that is and return us to what never changed. Let the water unburden your heart, free your mind and unclench your fists. Let us find our identity again to be people who are bound to the waters of the river Jordan as God's beloved. AMEN

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