

January 10, 2016  
Luke 3: 15-22  
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*“May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts, be acceptable in thy sight O God, our strength and our redeemer.”*

We have barely left the nativity of Jesus’ birth and here he is a man entering the waters of the Jordan to be baptized. Hold on friends – it will continue to move quickly now as the season of Lent is just around the corner...

The baptism of Jesus is a significant hinge in his life as a new door opens into a sense of his purpose and direction.

Baptism is one of two sacraments recognized in the United Church of Christ which means it is considered sacred and consecrated by God as a ritual that is entered into with deep intention and purpose. The second sacrament is communion. (In contrast, there are seven sacraments in Catholicism)

Baptism has many varied meanings in different Christian traditions. Sacred baths and immersions are found in other religions as well.

When we talked about it in Bible study this past week it clearly had more of an association with the fiery words of repentance and it was a ticket into heaven one day.

And some of us don’t remember our baptisms at all.

Others of us remember it well as teens or young adults

In the UCC it is traditionally understood as an act of blessing and affirmation of our need for God’ wisdom and guidance.

It is most often done when a child is an infant and the parents commit to raising their child in a Christian community.

We know that the institutional Church is changing --- as is the meaning of its rituals. We must evolve and allow the still-speaking God/Spirit, invite new meaning to these rituals.

Today I would like to invite you into what might be a new understanding of “baptism” –a new image of what this story may have meant, OR could mean for us today:

John’s life and family were completely immersed in the Jewish religious institution with all its traditions, politics and practices.

He has stepped away from all of that –perhaps he became

disillusioned...discouraged...despairing that the world was such a broken place as violence,

greed, selfishness...poverty...oppression...inequality...continued to hold reign on the human race...

And the established institutions were not making a dent in the struggles...

Yet something pulled at him ---HOPE? Possibility? God? A belief in Goodness that was bigger than all of the despair in the world?

He was foolish enough to consider that an invitation to come to the River --- all of us --- anyone who was willing to admit to the brokenness of humanity --- and find some value in an ancient ritual, inspired by a new purpose...

We tend to steer away from talk of sin --- it has such a judgmental/personal/pointing finger/shaming connotation for us modern day progressives for many good reasons --- But when I hear John speak of sin, I don't think he is pointing fingers at any particular individual --- or even particular "acts" --- **he is talking about the overall human struggle – human brokenness** --- He is talking about the sins of war and poverty, greed and selfishness that separate us from one another and from the Source of Life itself.

The ritual of baptism – coming to the Jordan was not just about individual salvation – it was an invitation to come to the River of Repentance on behalf of ALL creation ---

I can hear John saying, "heh folks, we are in this together – we are ALL drowning in fear --- we need healing together – we need to return to the Source of Life – we need help from a Higher Wisdom – a Higher Good than we seem to be able to find all on our own..."

And how powerful that Jesus is right there in the midst of all of that too ---- he is there with everyone else – in the sea of humanity, entering the waters of creation --- seeking connection and guidance and THE RENEWAL OF HOPE.

This image speaks to me right now as we struggle in our world with so much that frightens us – overwhelms us – that is hurting us and the beloved, precious, vulnerable planet ---

I imagine every one of us coming down to the waters to be cleansed, to start anew, to ask for help – to renew a sense of HOPE together.

Christians and Muslims, agnostics and atheists, Syrians and Americans, Palestinians and Israeli's. White men and black men; women, gay and straight, transgendered, ranchers, Native

Americans, birders, gun owners and non-gun owners, environmentalists and oil companies; Planned parenthood supporters and anti-abortion protesters...Tent dwellers and home owners...children and teens, teachers and congress, republicans and democrats, independents and socialists...

Get thee down to the river and admit to the mess we are in--- go down under those muddied waters and maybe even scrub away some self-righteousness (which we all do as we gather in our separate camps)– and when the lungs can't take any more we burst out of the water towards the light and sense the Love and interdependence that is pulsing through every part of creation – and

Just maybe, if we were all down there together, vulnerable and cold; struggling for air --- reconnecting to the Source of Life --- just maybe some kind of change, some kind of renewal, some kind of new sense of purpose and intention could be formed between us on behalf of the world...

Imagine it...Imagine a baptism like that...

And then imagine us all gathering around a table that is graced with bread and wine and gluten free crackers, fruit and cheeses, rice and fresh grown vegetables (and maybe some really good dark chocolate and good coffee too) –enough for everyone to eat and be filled ---

For today – that is how I invite you to consider the two sacraments of our faith ---**Baptism and Communion**

Baptism: A sacred ritual of renewal – an invitation to wash away fear and separateness on behalf of all creation– a call to connect with The Source of Life itself and with all creation that names us all Beloved, cherished, and needed...

Communion: A sacred table of abundance

A table of commitment to participate in Healing, Hope, Reconciliation and Peace.

Imagine it...just imagine it...

(This message led us into a renewal of baptism and the sharing of communion)