

Acts 19:1-7 (NRSV) ~ While Apollos was in Corinth, Paul passed through the interior regions and came to Ephesus, where he found some disciples. He said to them, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you became believers?" They replied, "No, we have not heard that there is a Holy Spirit." Then he said, "Into what then were you baptized?" They answered, "Into John's baptism." Paul said, "John baptized with the baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in the one who was to come after him, that is, in Jesus." On hearing this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. When Paul had laid his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came upon them, and they spoke in tongues and prophesied—together there were about twelve of them.

Mark 1:4-11 (*The Message*) ~ John the Baptizer appeared in the wild, preaching a baptism of life-change that leads to forgiveness of sins. People thronged to him from Judea and Jerusalem and, as they confessed their sins, were baptized by him in the Jordan River into a changed life. John wore a camel-hair habit, tied at the waist with a leather belt. He ate locusts and wild field honey.

As he preached he said, "The real action comes next: The star in this drama, to whom I'm a mere stagehand, will change your life. I'm baptizing you here in the river, turning your old life in for a kingdom life. His baptism - a holy baptism by the Holy Spirit - will change you from the inside out."

At this time, Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. The moment he came out of the water, he saw the sky split open and God's Spirit, looking like a dove, came down on him. Along with the Spirit, a voice: "You are my Son, chosen and marked by my love, pride of my life."

Wade in the Water

"Fill the glasses with water, honey," Mother said. "Daddy's guests will be here soon." Her young son carefully filled the fragile, crystal goblets. "How's it look, Mom?" Surveying the elegantly set table, she smiled and ruffled his hair. "You did great work, honey. Daddy will be so pleased." The boy grinned in anticipation of his father's approval.

The doorbell rang. "Our guests have arrived. Let's go greet them. We're done in here." After opening the door, and greeting the guests, the boy took his father's hand. "Come and see! Come and see what Mom and I did." Leaving his guests momentarily, and entering the dining room, his father lovingly picked him up. "You certainly did do a great job, son." The boy's face lit up with his father's approval.

Today we celebrate the baptism of Jesus of Nazareth. The setting had been prepared. God had summoned John to prepare the people for the arrival of the Messiah. John told the people that *he* was not the Messiah – the one they expected. But, the Messiah was coming . . . and indeed, skipping ahead a little in the story, we find that Jesus comes to be baptized by John. And after he was baptized and was praying, (and I love this description) the heaven was opened, and the Holy Spirit looking like a

dove, came down on him. And a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, chosen and marked by my love, pride of my life." None of the gospel writers sharing with us the account of Jesus baptism, tell us if Jesus face lit up with his father's approval. So, we'll have to use our imaginations here!

Do you remember in your life, how transforming it was to hear the praise of someone who was very important to you? Do you remember what it felt like to have confirmation from another that you had been gifted for a specific and important purpose? What an empowering feeling that is! Perhaps it was a teacher, a music instructor, a coach, a family member. Someone saw the potential within you and encouraged you to live into it! Do you remember the delight of that encouragement or the accolades?

Of course, experiencing the opposite can be powerful as well.

Remember that old adage, "Sticks and stones may break my bones, but names will never hurt me"? Well, that's not true. Many of us carry deep scars in our hearts well into adulthood from experiences of taunting, bullying, and rejection. Many of us still allow the shame of being among the last chosen to shape our present identities and behaviors. We think, "Why bother trying? I can't do that anyway"; or, "If I do that, everyone will laugh"; or, "Nobody likes me, so why should I care about them?" or, "I'm not going to get close to anyone; I will just be rejected anyway." We have all heard phrases like this echoing deep within our psyches. This happens at all ages and stages of life. Where is the hope? Where is a promise we can really count on? Where is a word from our merciful Savior?

The story of Jesus' baptism in the Jordan River is a threshold story. Jesus' baptism precedes his forty day journey into the desert, where he wrestles with temptation from the forces of evil. All of this prepares him for his public ministry. Baptism is an act of humility for Jesus, of bowing down to enter into and become one with the community of those baptized. Jesus surrenders himself, yields to John and to the path God has called him to travel. He is not resigned, but **active** in his "yes" to this new path. This kind of assent to a holy call requires courage. Baptism became a sacred "yes."

So, as we, today, as we remember Jesus' baptism, we are also asked to remember our own sharing in the sacred threshold moment, when we received our Creator's approval, and uttered a sacred "yes" to God's call upon our lives. Some of us were too young at the time of our baptism to remember all of this, except for the stories of our loved ones, and the claim upon our lives we know in our relationship with Christ. So, we might ask ourselves, "What have we forgotten?" "What part of that sacred 'yes' has faded over the years?" "How might we renew our commitment to journeying on God's path with freedom and great vision?"

In our U.M. ritual of baptism (found in the hymnal) we ask those to be baptized and their support persons: ***Do you accept the freedom and power God gives you to resist evil, injustice, and oppression in whatever forms they present themselves?***

Do you confess Jesus Christ as your Savior, put your whole trust in his grace, and promise to serve him as your Lord, in union with the church which Christ has opened to people of all ages, nations, and races?

In our more recent baptisms, we have asked: ***Do you repent of your sin, and desire to turn away from all temptations and choices which would cause you to sin against God and the human family?***

Do you desire to turn your focus in life toward God, whose unconditional love was offered to us through Jesus, the Christ, and who offers to us today the eternal presence of the Holy Spirit for guidance, comfort, and strength?

According to the gifts God has given you, will you serve as Christ's representatives in the world, advocating for justice, peace, compassion, and mercy for all of God's children?

This is the sacred 'yes' of an active faith-life. Preparing for today's worship, on the weekend of Human Relations Day, Martin Luther King, Jr.'s birthday observance, and the news of our nation's elected leader demeaning so many of our world neighbors, my soul has been in turmoil. One of Martin Luther King, Jr.'s quotes which has haunted me states, "In the end, we will remember not the words of our enemies, but the silence of our friends." And as I ask myself if my times of silence have promoted hatred, rather than the love of Jesus, I know I need to come to the waters to renew the **sacred 'YES'** made on my behalf so long ago. We will all have that opportunity as we worship today. I was not baptized into a faith of resignation, but following Jesus' example, I was baptized into the faith of active 'yesses' on behalf of all. We are given the opportunity to remember that we, too, are beloved, called to justice, anointed with power, and offered holy courage again and again to **proclaim our own sacred 'YES'** to stepping out in faith on the journey that God has placed before us. There is holy possibility on God's path to recommit and offer vision and freedom in the ways that we can, personally and within the community of faith. As God beckons us to the waters today, may our voices not be silent, but sing out a song of justice, especially for those who carry the memories, wounds, and scars of lack of respect, lack of hospitality, oppression, discrimination, and violence.

Together, may our songs unite with the great cloud of witnesses who have struggled through the ages with the need for the justice and freedom of Christ's reign. And may our response to God's call offer a resounding **'YES!'**