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January 12, 2020
Matthew 3:13-17

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be reflections of your word to us this morning, in Christ Jesus, we pray, Amen.

When I used to visit the Haven in my early 20's I loved to wade into the waves and sit on a comfortable rock that was completely surrounded by water. I still love being surrounded by water – I'm sure that's a large part of why I have made a home on 2 different islands in my life, and why I hardly ever leave our island home. This time of year I take the rain as a part of life – I don't always love it, but I do give thanks for the rainy season that sustains life in our ecosystem. And some days I even go out and drink in the freshness. After I have done all of my power outage prep, I might sit with a cup of tea and wait for the snow to fall, or whatever form the water takes as it falls to the ground.

Water is really an incredible substance, isn't it? . . . its ability to heal and sustain life, together with its ability to do damage and destroy. It makes winter wonderlands and slippery roads; rainbows in the sky and storm surges on the shore; it makes an afternoon of summer fun and bursts pipes when they freeze. It cleanses us, but not just when we wash, there is another quality to it. Water has an ability to reach the many layers of the human person, including our spirits. More than once in my life I have been blessed by water and emerged truly renewed. I'm not sure my baptism was one of those times – don't get me wrong, it was a powerful experience. But as an awkward teenager in front of the whole congregation, nervously laughing at the water dripping down my hair . . . the experience left me with a memory that is at the very least, complex.

But I love rituals because they cut through what is happening on the surface, and take us much deeper. Baptism is a beginning; not the beginning of our spiritual path, not the beginning of God's love for us, but the beginning of an intentional journey in the body of Christ. Baptism is an outward

manifestation of what has always been true, that we are beloved of God, and in the ritual our physical and spiritual selves name that truth and commit to living that truth as we journey forward.

Jesus came to his own baptism clear and ready. He is not exempt from the ritual; he comes to be with the people he is called to serve; he gets in the waters with us, and continues to do so from that day forward. John baptizes him, and as he is coming out of the water, we see one of the most visible manifestations of the trinity in scripture. Jesus the incarnate; the Holy Spirit coming down on him like lightning; and the audible voice of God proclaiming “this is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased.” The persons of the trinity are often described separately in this way: the Father or Creator as mystery, as one that is beyond our ability to know; then there is the Son, the one we know the best because he came in human form and taught us with lasting stories and physical healings that changed the course of history; then the Holy Spirit who is difficult to detect, but when something amazing happens we often give it credit. Last week I read a quote from Mike Raschko, a professor of mine from seminary, who describes the trinity in a way that brings them all together and feels truer to me than thinking of them separately. He writes: “where the Holy Spirit moves at the will of the Father, the Word becomes incarnate in history.”¹ They may be distinct, but they are One.

This pattern is all over the scriptures: “At the very dawn of creation, before God created the heavens and the earth, the Spirit blew over the waters of chaos. Then God’s Word was spoken again and again, and all sorts of creatures came into being: light, planets and stars, dry land and vegetation, animals of all kinds. All created things embody and bring to expression . . . the Word of God.”²

The same is true in liturgy . . . when a person comes for baptism, through prayer and blessing with water, the individual becomes a member of the Body of Christ. As the Body of Christ, we are, as a whole, Christ-shaped; we are Word of God-shaped. In that moment of baptism, the Holy Spirit shapes the individual to become part of the whole. This is the beginning; not the beginning of God’s love for us, but

¹ A Christian Understanding of Human Nature p. 182.

² Ibid, 183.

the beginning of an intentional journey in the Body of Christ. The journey is extraordinary. Sometimes I wonder what I got myself into on the day of my baptism. Life in the Body of Christ is not always easy, but it does always feel right and brings deep peace.

The Holy Spirit remains with us on the journey. It's difficult to distinguish where our choices end and the movement of the Holy Spirit begins, where our gifts and talents intermingle with the Spirit's work . . . the details are surely beyond us, but it is good to gather around the font from time to time and remember the Holy Spirit is present and working in our lives. It is good to remember the blessing that brought us here. It is good to remember to whom we belong; in whom we live and have our being. It's good to remember that God will use us as much as we make ourselves available. The journey that began at baptism is an inner one as much as it is an outer one; it's a journey of grace working in us, helping us to attune our lives evermore to God, helping us to make ever more room for God, that we may be useful to the growing of God's kingdom. Where will the Holy Spirit guide us next? And how might She use you along the journey?

And so we come to the font to remember, to be renewed in body, mind and spirit, to dedicate ourselves again to God's kingdom here on earth.

Tom Hunter – River of Grace (Sung by Rev. Karen) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZXs3cYDo3_U

We come here today to the river of grace to bathe in the blessing that washes our face – with healing and comfort, a place to belong, renewing commitment so faith will grow strong.

So pour out the water! Let it roll down! Sprinkle and splash it on the soul and the ground! So God's love will grow in these children we bring, with baptism's waters to welcome us in.

So come now Creator, come Christ, Holy Ghost, bless all of your people, but bless these the most. Wherever life takes us, may this be our prayer: O God, guide and hold us in your loving care.