

Sunday, January 12, 2025 ~ Luke 3:15-17,21-22

If this scripture sounds really familiar, that's because the lectionary had us read part of it about a month ago as well. In December, I talked about John. But today, we are focusing on Jesus...particularly the baptism of Jesus.

Why did Jesus get baptized by John when John's baptism is typically understood as a baptism for the forgiveness of sin?

Well, baptism wasn't much different then than it is now. Baptism was and is a sort of initiation...an affirmation of a life path. John was baptizing people to prepare them for the coming of the messiah. John, as you know, was expecting the messiah to lead the Jewish people into a new era of peace and prosperity and justice. John believed that both the power of Rome, and the corrupt religious leaders were going to be swept away in judgement and John was trying to prepare people for this dynamic paradigm shift. So Jesus was, in effect, joining John's revolution against the establishments of earthly power. The religious establishment of the temple and the political establishment of Rome. Jesus' baptism was an initiation into the movement against all of the powers that oppressed the Jewish people. In getting baptized, Jesus was joining John's movement.

The dove, as I have mentioned before, was an exclusively feminine symbol in the ancient near east, so that voice that Jesus heard was undoubtedly feminine. That is not to say that God is female, but rather that God is evidenced in both male and female, as Genesis points out.

A "constitutive other" in psychology refers to the significant people in our lives who actively shape our sense of self and identity, meaning that without their presence or interaction, our understanding of who we are would be incomplete; essentially, "the other" that helps to define "the self"

by providing a point of comparison and interaction.

A child's parents are often primary constitutive others, as their interactions, expectations, and values significantly influence how a child develops their self-concept. God the father, and God the mother, the Holy Spirit, were and are Jesus' constitutive others. We describe the three as trinity. One God, three personalities. Now, the earlier story we read a few weeks ago in Luke, where Jesus stays at the temple in Jerusalem as his parents head home and then answers Mary's question about why he hung back and worried them so with, "why were you searching? Didn't you know I would be in my Father's house?" Revealed to us that Jesus had the spiritual maturity to recognize His relationship with His Heavenly Father. In the act of joining the revolution, Jesus comes into a full understanding of his identity As the Holy Spirit confirms Jesus' Sonhood. And the Holy Spirit drives Jesus into the wilderness. Because The Spirit of God is always about movement. The Holy Spirit in our scripture today is described as fire and wind...two things that are always moving...movement is part of their identity. Christianity was never supposed to be a boxed up religion, where we come to church and the preacher hands us our happy meal of faith and sends us off. Christianity was not supposed to be a religion, it was supposed to be a movement. The problem is we would rather come to church and **worship** Jesus than go out into the world and **follow** Jesus. A moving God is disconcerting. Especially a God who moves downward into places we would rather not go. As Father Richard Rohr writes: We keep saying, "We love Jesus," but more as a God-figure than as someone to imitate. It seems the more we talk about Jesus, the less time we have to do what he said.

The truth is, we like the kind of power that Rome had. The control and the order, even at the cost of people who can't keep up... people who don't fit in with the social order. And we like the kind of power that the religious authorities had, deciding who is in and who is out...that is of course, as long as we are "in".

But God, apparently, does not like that kind of power. Clearly, because Jesus joined a movement against that type of power. And the Holy Spirit affirmed and encouraged Him. Jesus is affirmed by God. The Holy Spirit affirms us...in other words, the starting point for faith and transformation is positive not negative. God is our constitutive other, as revealed in Jesus. That's good news! What great news! Imagine God saying this to you, "you are my child, whom I love!" Baptism with fire is a fire of conscious realization that God is our constitutive other. The fire of conviction...not that we are right, but rather that we are right with God. Baptism of fire is not about creeds and codes, it is about relationship. Relationship that sets the Spirit in motion in our lives. The Holy Spirit truly burns all pretense away. Only God, only love will remain in the heart that has been filled with the Holy Spirit. And this is the Spirit that we are supposed to bring to the world. Are people feeling the Holy Spirit in us? Seeing her at work? Are we different from people who are caught up in the spirit of the world? We are here to point toward freedom from that worldly spirit. How do we do that?

We do that by nurturing our own personal relationship with God through prayer and meditation.

We do that by nurturing our relationship with the body of Christ through engagement, encouragement and love.

and we do that through a transformative relationship with the world, as we work as a **movement, inspired by the holy spirit** toward bringing the kingdom of heaven to earth.

Through the Holy Spirit. In Romans 8: 26-30 Paul assures us that God will use every detail in our lives of love for God.

Jesus joined John's movement against the powers of oppression, and marginalization. A movement Jesus would transform after His time in the wilderness. The Holy Spirit affirmed Jesus on this path. And **Jesus** is the example we follow. Right into the desert. We live in a world that would rather go to the mall to distract itself from itself. But we are the people who head to the desert to resist everything that would distract us from God our source. The source that is always on the move. Moving toward creating heaven on earth. What would it be like to, **like Jesus**, have the Holy Spirit constantly telling us what to do? Constantly affirming us? Well, We do and She is. Her voice is calling out for us all to join the movement of liberation. To stand up against any power that oppresses or marginalizes any human being. She is calling us to follow Jesus and join the movement. We just have to listen and move.

Meditation: the poet Rumi wrote "You are not a drop in the ocean, you are the entire ocean in a drop"