

The Rev. Emily Dunevant

Mark 1:4-11
Genesis 1:1-5
Psalm 29
Acts 19:1-7

January 10, 2021
The First Sunday after the Epiphany

The Jordan River isn't very pretty. The water is often murky. At places, it's loaded with tourists. At others, it simply fades to a sliver of slow running water making its way through a drainage pipe under a road. It isn't very wide, so don't expect it to look like the James. At its widest, the Jordan is about 100 feet wide. At its deepest...about 17 feet.

I love the idea that the Jordan is so average and unassuming. Kind of like something we might see in our backyards. It's like the creek beds I played in as a child. Where I would catch salamanders and listen to bull frogs. Where the cows came to cool themselves on a hot day. Where the tree roots were exposed to make the perfect place to sit and swirl your toes and watch the water ripple with each swish.

But, isn't there something so beautiful about the ordinary nature of the Jordan River? I say that because all too often when we read bible stories, they seem like a scene from some other time, an other-worldly place full of holy and sacred people. People who have done all of the incredible acts of faith and when they stay in our biblical imaginations, we can too easily keep them at arms length. Wanting to learn from them but feeling a little less than worthy of the divine promises they represent.

Yet, the Jordan is something we know...at least you know it if you have ever taken the time to ramble down a country trail.

And...this is where we find Jesus this morning. Wading into that ordinary water with tadpoles surely circling his feet and the shadows dancing around him as the leaves move about in the breeze. We find him there, a part of the earth, sand beneath his feet, water embracing him, sun warming him. And it is here that he is baptized. It is here that the Spirit of God descends upon him and calls him beloved.

I bring us to that ordinary water, that place we can all relate to, because this story isn't just something we find in ancient texts, it's something we have all lived at one time or another. It isn't something to be simply revered. It's something to be embodied.

As we think about the powerful impact of Jesus' baptism in the Jordan, it's so important to remember that this story, this baptism is not some other worldly event. Quite the contrary, it's so simple, so accessible and it is for each and every one of us.

I want to challenge you this morning to bring that water into your life. In whatever way you can. I want you to believe that that water was meant for you...in all of its redemptive, cleansing power. Ordinary you. Ordinary me. In all of our flaws and in all of our beauty. That water, full of

tadpoles and salamanders holds a love that takes us in and says you are my beloved. Just as you are. My beloved. This is our identity.

And with that identity, comes a responsibility. A responsibility to not only claim those waters as our own but to be willing to live into the commitment that they require. As The Rev. Dr. Marshall Jolly, states, "...baptism isn't a sacramental participation trophy to be displayed in a lighted and locked cabinet. Baptism is the beginning of our life in covenantal relationship with the living God...."

When God says to Jesus, "You are my child, the Beloved. With you I am well pleased..." let us ask ourselves...What pleases God today? What does that responsibility look like in your life? In our communal lives?

We continue to face a world that is ever changing, at times it is utterly heart-breaking. From not being able to see our families and friends, to losing our loved ones to illness, to growing unrest in our nation, to anger and hate and violence. We find ourselves over and over again in situations where the responsibility of our baptism calls forth within us a holy and sacred response.

What pleases God today?

I started with the ordinary image of the Jordan River. The reminder that the power of that moment, of Jesus' baptism, although incredibly sacred, is not set aside for a select few. It is meant to be accessible to all of us. Our biggest challenge is having the courage to take the responsibility of our baptisms and do something with it.

On Friday, I offered a short reflection on the unrest in our nation's Capitol and I said these words: When you see ugliness, build beauty. When you see hate, build love. When you see anger and oppression, build peace and opportunity. When you see division, build hope.

Each and every one of us can start with these simple ideas. Simple ideas that can have tremendous impact. Where we take the ordinary and turn it into extraordinary acts of lived faith.

There will be times when even these simple acts will take great courage. There will be times when they will be met with bitterness or anger or dismissiveness. Our baptism does not ask...what pleases us and our comfort. It asks...what pleases God. But the result, if we take up our responsibility as Christians, is an opportunity to build a better, more loving world as children of God.

I want to end with one of my favorite interpretations of our Baptismal Covenant. It is the Covenant rewritten in the form of a prayer, a prayer that restates the Covenant in ways that relate to life as we live it, our ordinary lives full of real emotion and real experience. Because

our Covenant is a living, breathing statement of faith, we need to connect it to our living, breathing everyday lives.

At the end of each segment of the prayer, I will hold a moment of silence. I ask that you add your own prayers. What is God calling forth in you?

PRAYING THE BAPTISMAL COVENANT

Do you believe in God the Father, in Jesus Christ, the Son of God and in God the Holy Spirit?

Our God, It's one thing to say the creed but another to put my trust in you. Help me to live with the assurance that you are my Father and that nothing can separate me from your love, trusting in your forgiveness expressed in Jesus and looking to your Spirit to make me your person.

Will you continue in the apostles' teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of bread and in the prayers?

Our God, I know I was not meant to go it alone because you created the church to be a supportive family for your children. And I know the church is made up of people like me – so it isn't perfect! Help me to play my part in the church, so I can learn from the teaching, be encouraged by the fellowship, be renewed in the Eucharist, and find strength for living each day through prayer.

Will you preserve in resisting evil and, whenever you fall into sin, repent and return to the Lord?

Our God, You understand that sometimes I do things I never intended to do. My sorrow does not put it right. Neither can I use my weakness as an excuse. Help me to begin anew, to experience your forgiveness and to walk again in Jesus' way.

Will you proclaim by word and example the Good News of God in Christ?

Our God, Help me to live the way Jesus called me to live. May my actions speak louder than my words of your love and of new life in Jesus. At the same time, help me rise above my own stumbling speech and give me the words to express what I believe. Let me be a witness to the Truth.

Will you seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving your neighbor as yourself?

Our God, All too often I have looked at people in a very superficial way. Help me begin to see them with your eyes, knowing that every person is created in your image, as your child. If Jesus died for that person, how can I despise them? Give me a new love that reaches out to everyone because Jesus died for all.

Will you strive for justice and peace among all people and respect the dignity of every human being?

Our God, I do not want my attitudes to be shaped by the injustices that mar society, by the discriminations, greed and lust that spoil relationships. In Jesus color does not count, wealth carries no weight, and gender is not important. Help me to live in Jesus, to see people through His eyes, and work for the harmony that reflects your kingdom.

Amen.

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