

January 13th, 2008

Baptism of Jesus Sunday
Matthew 3:13-17

“Blessing and Power”

This past week on the Television series “Grey’s Anatomy” I was surprised to discover a spiritual/religious situation being addressed. A woman was very ill and the doctors had determined she needed surgery to live. She and two of her healing friends were spending time together in her room in meditation and going through the chakras, an Eastern spiritual practice of recognizing the different spiritual healing powers that dwell in the different areas of our bodies. The woman had healing powers and deep observational powers about what was happening within another’s psyche. Her insights about one of the male doctors based on how he carried himself were very perceptive. Another doctor and her partner, dealing with their child’s accident and struggling with blame and guilt, find this woman brings a healing presence as she takes their hands and leads them in prayer.

A group of doctors observing this are able to at least give space for the spiritual in the practice of medicine and helping people get well.

We live in a time when the power of technology and science in our lives leads to a squeezing out of the spiritual/mystical/awesome. We have an explanation for everything. Mystery and wonder do not have an easy time in our world. Explanations are valued more than experiences.

I’ve always loved the story of the woman who had just performed an elaborate and powerful dance before an audience. An interviewer afterwards asked the exhausted dancer to explain what the dance meant. She replies: “If I could have said it in words do you think I would have went to all that trouble to dance it.”

Have you noticed on the subway that there is poetry amidst the various advertisements? They remind me of another dimension to life, that I am more than a consumer of products. The poems on the subway express another essential element of our humanity, they tell stories, offer metaphors, and symbols, speak of pain and joy.

Another dimension, a depth dimension. In our world which so often runs the danger of cutting out mystery, wonder, other levels and layers of life, we need the poets, the dancers, the artists, the musicians.

We have just come through the high season of wonder filled stories in our Christian tradition. Stars, shepherds, dreams, immaculate conception, angels, animals, mangers, wise ones from the east “star of wonder, star of night, star with royal beauty bright, west ward leading, still proceeding, guide us to thy perfect light.” We experienced the wonder and power of the story once more through drama and music in our Pageant; through story telling; through Choir anthems and solos; through moving from darkness in the Sanctuary on Christmas Eve to everyone holding up a lit candle.

Lighting people’s candles I could see wonder, especially in the children. They say Christmas is for children and the child that dwells in each of us. There is a reason that Jesus says: “Unless you become like children you cannot see the Kingdom of God.”

I love the Avery and Marsh hymn that says:
Come as a little child; come with a smile of eagerness, greet each new day as a special gift of love; even if you’re old and grey, though you’ve come a long hard way, come ready to follow and explore, ready to lift your wings and soar, for of such is the Kingdom, for of such is the Kingdom, come as a child.”

Today is Baptism of Jesus Sunday. Jesus comes to the Jordan to be baptized by John the Baptist. Two men in a river, nothing too awe-inspiring and mysterious about that. Then we read in Matthew’s account: “And when Jesus had been baptized, just as he came up from the water, suddenly the heavens were opened to him and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, “This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased.”

Suddenly.....wonderfully.....amazingly.....breathtakingly.....the heavens are opened, the Spirit of God descends like a dove and a Voice speaks from heaven.

Wow!!

The divine and human meet. Amidst the ordinary God chooses to dwell. The Jordan River, which is not much more than a stream, is where Jesus is immersed in the water and “all heaven breaks loose!!”

We may ask of the Scripture stories.....Did it really happen like that? Are they factual?

Do we believe that God can enter our ordinary lives with a wonder working power and shake up everything, make all things new, transform what is dead to life, heal us of all our illnesses?

and languages and nationalities, gathered together, eating, laughing, talking, listening, serving, being together. We are baptized into a community. In community we are blessed.

At his baptism Jesus hears God's voice. It is a voice of blessing that gives Jesus power to go out and love, heal, bless, comfort, challenge, touch others. Many of us are concerned about our friends Andrew and Leonora Obara and their family in Kenya. Our youth group and others who have visited them in Kenya have also met others who live there. Our Youth are fearful for the safety of their friends at this difficult time in the life of the people there.

Our youth have come together in Christian compassion and love and prepared a petition that will be taken to our Canadian parliament; they have brought this petition for us to sign today; they have been interviewed on CBC radio this week. Our Youth Group are living out their baptism, expressing their love for and solidarity with the people of Kenya, some who they know, who are living in fear and violence, and calling us to stand in solidarity with the people of Kenya and commit ourselves and our government to working for a just solution.

I Came across this Affirmation of Baptismal Faith.

There are some phrases I am going to ask you to repeat.

"I believe in the power of baptism. (Repeat)

I believe that something deeper than I know happens and I am bound forevermore to a life that is ancient yet born anew in me.

I believe in the power of baptism (repeat) to transcend time and space and call me to discipleship with Christ.

The muddy waters of the Jordan River
that swirl over Jesus

merge with the clear waters of the baptismal font
that splash on me

and we become one as those waters are one.

I am no longer my own or on my own. (Repeat)

I believe in the power of baptism (repeat)
to shake the heavens and my world.

I believe in the power of baptism (repeat)
to call us to ourselves and to Christ.

I believe in the power of baptism(repeat)

to immerse us in the waters of blessing
and send us forth, wet and wild with hope,
to be a blessing ourselves.
Amen.”

I wanted to end with a prayer and I would ask you to repeat it after me.
Let us pray.

“You (people repeat)

You are God.....

You called me.....

You called me beloved.....

By grace I came here.....

To accept my name.....

To be your servant.....

To build your realm.....

Amen..

Hymn: 378 “Spirit of God, Descend Upon My Heart”