

## *In Deep*

A Message shared with the congregation of St. Andrew's United Church

January 9, 2022

by Rev. Dave Le Grand

Here I am, in isolation. Now don't worry, I'm fine, not even sure what I have. We are just being careful. We are doing a lot of that right now, being careful. Well, most of us, right?

Encounters with the Holy Spirit, now; they are all about risk. Life is never the same. An angel says "be not afraid" to an unassuming person, I'm thinking that if I put myself in Mary's shoes, where the Holy Spirit orchestrated an experience of God, I would feel like I'm in deep. Faith can, should be, like that – risky, feeling on the edge, transformative moments. I said *moments*, not just one, but perhaps many spiritual moments that change our lives.

Have you had one of those spiritual transformative moments? Do you associate Baptism with transformation? There is drama with baptizing God's precious little ones at least:

*Will the baby stay quiet when the Reverend trickles water on her?*

*Will Dave drop her in that slippery silk gown?*

To be quite frank, often Baptisms are beautiful, and speak to me about the beauty of life and love and community, but life transforming.

But, hang on, every so often there is a moment in a Baptism. It is often when a youth or adult chooses to be Baptized, that I will witness something life-changing. I have seen an entire family being Baptized together. I have witnessed a person coming out to their community of faith, trusting that the church would love them unconditionally. It was a beautiful moment, that testimony shared, and the congregation clapping spontaneously before the actual moment of Baptism. The Spirit moved. A new chapter of ministry for that child of God had begun.

That sense of faith calling us to the water, going "in deep", is what we should come to worship, come to life, expecting, every day of our lives.

Yes, I'm home, isolating, but do you think these walls (Dave gesturing around him recording this message from home) can keep out the Spirit, if I am open to holy moments? No way!

Have you had one or a few of those moments that convinced you that you are part of something bigger? Have you had moments that reminded you that you are not alone where you are? A sensation that you were created special, to do special things; Ministry.

Baptism, whether we baptize an infant or a 90-year-old, it marks us, spiritually, as God's precious one, and reminds us that God has ministry in mind for all of us. We gathered around young people – Connor, Torrin – laid hands on them – surrounding them in love and prayer, as they embarked on ministry experiences.

Did you know that while in some Gospels John baptized Jesus, in others John did not – he was said to already be in jail? I wonder why – there are some interesting theories suggested by Bible scholars.

So there is Jesus, being baptized by someone, and the heavens open up, then a holy voice declares God’s love for Jesus. A powerful spiritual moment for sure. In Luke’s story, though, the Holy Spirit had met others. Touched not just Jesus, but regular people who didn’t see it coming. They too were In Deep.

In the first chapter an angel brings good news to Mary,

“The Holy Spirit will [be] upon you and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God”<sup>1</sup>

Mary’s life surely changed that day. In the Gospel of Luke, though, there had already been other holy moments, theophanies.<sup>2</sup> When Mary visited Elizabeth, Elizabeth felt the baby, who would be named John, leap in her. The air around them is charged with holiness.<sup>3</sup> Then, the doubting priest, Elizabeth’s husband Zechariah, was rendered speechless until John was born.<sup>4</sup> When he writes down that they should name him “John”, words of praise pour from Zechariah’s mouth. People witnessing this don’t know what to do or say.

*You are my beloved child, I love you, moments.*

Brian D. McLaren lays out a major theme in his book “The Great Spiritual Migration”<sup>5</sup>, that, in the last three hundred years, the Christian Church has focused on what one needs to believe in order to be in the In-group that goes to heaven. There is an individualistic mindset that has crept into communities of faith. McLaren invites us to reconceive God’s salvation as saving us from that whole In-group/Out-group (“believer”/“unbeliever”) way of thinking. If we can do it, then those holy moments cannot be experienced alone, but within community. Focusing less on the afterlife, and more on how can we Love.<sup>6</sup>

Again, think about your spiritual – Wow – moments. Perhaps moments orchestrated by God’s Spirit. More likely moments outside of Sunday worship, perhaps inviting us to realize that we worship, and we can seek encounters with the holy, every moment of every day. Imagine, if we translated those moments not just as an isolated moment of

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<sup>1</sup> Luke chapter 1 verse 35

<sup>2</sup> Lutheran Pastor Paul J. Nuechterlein addresses this at [http://girardianlectionary.net/reflections/year-c/epiphany1c\\_1998\\_ser/](http://girardianlectionary.net/reflections/year-c/epiphany1c_1998_ser/)

<sup>3</sup> See Luke chapter 1, verse 39-44.

<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Luke+1%3A+39-45&version=NRSV>

<sup>4</sup> Luke chapter 1, verses 5 – 20 and 57-65.

<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Luke+1%3A+5-20%2C+57-65&version=NRSV>

<sup>5</sup> Brian D. McLaren, pp. 51-53 *The Great Spiritual Migration: How the World’s Largest Religion is Seeking a Better Way to Be Christian* © 2016 Random House

<sup>6</sup> Paul J. Nuechterlein <http://girardianlectionary.net/reflections/year-c/epiphany-1c-sermon-notes-2019/>

wonder, but the holy inviting us, encouraging us, to love – love our families, our community, including loving strangers and people who differ profoundly from us, and to love our world.

Those moments of feeling, In Deep. A calling to community. An invitation to risky, unconditional love. Can we at St. Andrew's United Church, we in our lives, become incubators of the holy – creating space for Spirit to change lives?

McLaren likes how Eastlake Community Church in Bothell, Washington describes what being Christian is for them on their website:<sup>7</sup>

It's probably important to start by making it clear that we're not the ones who "got it right". Neither do we possess the secret to **life**, exclusive access to **truth** or the only **way** to find fulfillment. We are, however, powerfully drawn to the person of Jesus, his teaching and even more so, his life. So, we are experimenting, and failing, and building a community that collectively follows his Way; hoping, trusting and even doubting that it might seed something beautiful in the world, namely, full and abundant life for all creation.

*We think the **truth** about **life** may just be **love** and **love** may just be the **way**.*

Are you prepared for this kind of experience of being In Deep?  
If you are, let's jump in together.

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<sup>7</sup> Check out their engaging website at <https://www.eastlakeecc.com/> (scroll down for the quoted message)