

Go Deep

A sermon shared with the congregation of St. Andrew's United Church
January 13, 2019, Baptism of Jesus
Scripture: Jeremiah 33: 14-16
by Rev. Dave Le Grand

Luke's version of this story of the baptism of Jesus is shorter than Matthew's and Mark's; much less detail, less drama. But two interesting things unique to today's story: first, the line up. Jesus waits in line for his turn at baptism. Luke's version of Jesus does not expect special treatment. What a powerful ancient picture of solidarity.

The second element of this story that is unique to Luke is that after John baptizes Jesus, Jesus immediately prays. Bible scholar Linda Mckinnish Bridges points out that prayer is a particular passion of Luke's, especially Jesus modelling prayer for his followers.

There are 7 times in the Gospel of Luke when Jesus stops and prays.¹

I internalized, from where I don't know, a skewed version of Jesus that says, in essence, that Jesus looked human, but really he was divine – the humanity was a show. Christianity has always had people who subscribed to extreme theologies – Jesus all divine, or not divine at all. How tempting it is to define, to try to control holiness. In our Gospels, and in this very passage, we are presented with an opportunity to find mysterious balance: A very much **human** Jesus who waited his turn in line with the masses... Jesus who prayed – who depended on his Creator too!

Jesus was very much human; lived, loved, and hurt as a human. I don't think we could relate to him as followers if he wasn't human. **But Jesus' humanity is tempered by something holy.** John the baptizer too was anticipating the Messiah coming. After baptism, there is the Spirit descending like a dove and the Holy Voice declaring Jesus special.

So what is the Good News that we might take from this baptism story? 30 years ago, as a long haired backpacker, I had the privilege to travel across the Sinai dessert. I spent a night in a small hippie village along the Red Sea. After the tide went out, there were many tide pools left. On the surface were urchins and other sea creatures, but it was when I lifted the stones in the pools that I experienced the wonder of strange and colourful creatures.

The wisdom I took from that experience has stuck with me; that only when I dig, explore, go deeper, do I truly encounter wonder and the sacred.

As for today's story of a very human Jesus being baptized, I suggest that you need to sit with it. Like the process of Lectio Divina – ask yourself: **what in Luke's version of the baptism of Jesus stands out for you?** Is it the image of Jesus standing in line, waiting patiently rather than strutting in like a worldly king expecting a red carpet? Or, maybe you resonate with that image of Jesus, after his baptism, praying – perhaps a

¹ Linda Mckinnish Bridges, *Feasting on the Word: Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary*, Year C, Volume 1: Advent through Transfiguration. Jesus' focus on prayer can be found in Luke: 5:16; 6:12; 9:18, 28ff.; 11:1; 22:41; & 23:46

prayer of thanks, just as you or I would in such moment. Or, perhaps your heart sings as you read the part about the Spirit descending like a dove, and the Holy Voice saying: You are mine, I am pleased with you.

Here's the thing. We have this gift of a rich tradition called Baptism; it's symbolism of death and new life is lived out daily in the midst of what might seem mundane lives. Think about it – death symbolized by being immersed in the water completely, we as followers of Jesus are called to die to old unhelpful, unhealthy, even hurtful ways over and over again. New Life symbolized by emerging from the water; being born anew into God's ways - transformation.

What behaviours or attitudes of yours need to die? Do you ever feel like you are in spiritual auto pilot, your curiosity to discover eclipsed by routine? Have you felt spiritual nudges lately? Desire to risk, to make a choice or two that might raise eyebrows? The Holy Voice is often very quiet, requiring us to pay attention. Rather like that meandering Canadian kneeling at the tide pool; turning over rocks and marvelling at what is revealed. Like Jesus, overwhelmed by Grace after baptism, praying.

What you take from Jesus' baptism story in Luke is unique to you. BUT, there is a community component this process too. Remember, Jesus in this story was not baptized in private. He was among a community of **seekers; seekers of what**, I doubt they knew. I suspect that Jesus himself was a seeker even as he was a teacher, leader and healer. We find meaning individually, but Christian tradition also teaches that we must find wisdom and good news together. Here we are this morning... together.

How can we do that more? Discovering spiritual treasure together here at St. Andrew's? In the infancy of this new year, I hope we can find fresh ways, to journey with one another, encouraging one another to Go Deep. May we discover God's Good News of hope and love together. May we boldly proclaim that Good News in our lives.