

SERMON NEW SONG EPISCOPAL CHURCH

EPIPHANY 1 – MARK 1.4-11

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Some Gospel passages are like old friends, they are so familiar. Does this passage about Jesus' baptism qualify/ Unfortunately, "old familiars" are easier to keep at arms length, not let their electricity short circuit our very defenses against their messages. . How do we keep hearing them as if for the first time? Its a dynamite passage.

Compare Gopel accounts. Notice how the first three Gospels approach the story differently. Matthew all but apoloizes for Jesus being baptized by John and not vice versa. Both Matthew and Luke have a long discourse on the place and teachin of John as preface, as if to make sure we know that the Baptist claimed only to be the predecessor, the opening act to warm up the crowd for the Messiah. John's Gospel doesn't show the actual baptism at all.

So why was Jesus baptized? As Matthew knew, it might contradict any doctrine of sinlessness. So did Jesus considere himself a sinner? The answer could be "yesf" if we think of sin not as the actions of sins, bu as sin, a break in a relationship, above all with God. Perhaps he

already had experienced estrangement from family or friends, or his heavenly Father.

At the Jordan no one else sees the heavens open or the dove or hears the voice. So we have this moving moment. Mark's Gospel is so trim, it can hardly wait to come to that event. Jesus knew he was called by God into deep intimacy, which he must have shared with his disciples. Awesome, and they share it with us.

When has God brought you close and given you, or affirmed, your vocation? It may not happen when you come up out of the baptismal waters, but we celebrate our callings on this day whenever they occurred. Just as you only get baptized once, these experiences last a lifetime.

The Spirit clobbered St. Paul hard enough on the road to Damascus that he knew forever that he was the apostle to the Gentiles. Mother Theresa's revelation occurred early on while riding on a train, and while she wished God would do a return visit now and then, that one visitation sustained her for the rest of her ministry.

Me, your lowly servant, had an encounter in seminary with a verse in the Letter to the Hebrews which rooted me on my path for the duration. Scripture can do that, the word of God after all.

Do you remember hearing or feeling those words of Jesus' vision for yourself--You are my Beloved. With you I am

well pleased. You I accept just as you are. There could never be another you I have your back. Also your front, your top and bottom, all of you I hold dear." Do you remember that? That's how we fall in love with God and God's Son. We don't know where this life in Christ will lead, after all falling in love of any kind is agreeing to a lot more than you otherwise would in your right mind, and if you knew what lay ahead. But we sign on with love, accepting the suffering and joy along the way, knowing that we are always loved, always Beloved., even to the cross.

So today at the feast of the Baptism of Jesus we celebrate your calling and mine to follow Christ Jesus. It's like what we do at New Song when we go up to communion and sign each other as we pass the font. We celebrate the reminder of our calling, our baptism.

Theologian Lee Barrett goes back a couple of generations to give a nod to Swiss theologian Karl Barth. "Barth proposed that God's claiming of Jesus in this story," says Barrett, "summarizes the essence of the gospel: the astonishing claim that God does not wish to remain hidden in the heights of heaven but descends to the depths of earthly life in order to be seen and heard by us finite creatures."

This week we witnessed just how deep those depths can go. The hate, the willingness not just to confront but to

overthrow the institutions of our common life, all were stunning and scary to me. And then Black folks reminded us how different their marches were handled by the police compared to this one. Within a day someone put this limerick in a media place:

A mob of the MAGA persuasion

Conducted a Capitol invasion.

Though possibly armed

But mostly unharmed

And that's how you knew they're Caucasian.

So race rears its ugly head as well Love in any form seemed in very short supply.

I bring this up in the context of baptism because I believe none of us can avoid having some part to play in bringing about good change. African American theologian Cornell West said "Justice is the public form of love." Events of this year, hard as they have been, put us squarely on a justice path. Our injustice keeps being revealed, which is what happened in Washington on Epiphany. Epiphany! The unveiling.

Emma Jordan-Simpson, the Director of the oldest Christian pacifist organization in the country, the Fellowship of Reconciliation, was struck by so many announcers and others saying "This is not America. We are not like this."

Well, she said, that is a big lie along with all the others. We are like this. She said, "The reality is far different. It is the story of radical settler colonization and violence rooted in white supremacy. It is the story of the pursuit of property and power made possible by genocide and built on the labor of the enslaved."

In small ways and large, we have a role in healing our nation from its unlovingness and the lies we collectively tell to maintain them. My great grandfather's farm was two stages forward from being taken out of Indian territory. We've visited the sites of Indian raids in the area, but never mentioned the other "raid."

In this week's "Forward Day by Day" the writer, Bp. Greg Rickel of the Diocese of Olympia, calls attention to the Magi leaving Bethlehem and going "home by another way" because of creepy King Herod. Says Bp. Rickel, "In a sense, this is what the holy epiphany of Jesus does to all of us. We approach him via one route--and if we see Jesus for who and what he is, we leave on a different path."

We are on that different path, my friends. We are on that path.

