

Stretching Toward Sunday

Thoughts, readings and reflections
based on this week's lectionary readings

January 10, 2021
Baptism of the Lord, Year B

The readings this week:

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

[Click here to read this week's Scriptures](#)

Holy Collision!

"I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit." ~ Mark 1:8

One of the wonderful things about Mark's gospel is that the evangelist gets right to what is important, omitting all fluff and extraneous detail. In less than a chapter we're at the Jordan for a holy collision of water, Word, and Spirit. In just a few short verses Jesus will submit to the baptism of the cousin/evangelist "unfit to tie the thong of his sandals" and will receive the heavenly stamp of approval in a dramatic scene involving heavens rent asunder and a dive bombing bird (aka Holy Spirit). Forget the delicate hovering dove and placid savior; this is intense drama that's going to move along faster than a Clint Eastwood blockbuster. Have you ever had a gull swoop down on you at the beach? Do you know what it is like to feel the rush of wings at your ear? It might be a good idea to remind the congregation to hang on for a roller-coaster ride through Year B. Or, as Annie Dillard writes with great clarity and truth

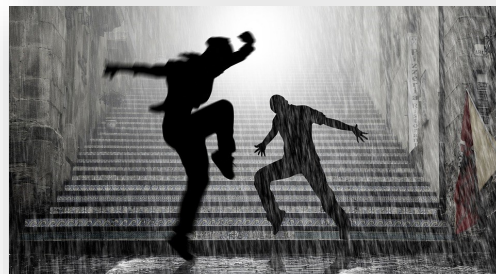
"Does any-one have the foggiest idea what sort of power we so blithely invoke? Or, as I suspect, does no one believe a word of it? The churches are children playing on the floor with their chemistry sets, mixing up a batch of TNT to kill a Sunday morning. It is madness to wear ladies' straw hats and velvet hats to church; we should all be wearing crash helmets. Ushers should issue life preservers and signal flares; they should lash us to our pews. For the sleeping god may wake some day and take offense, or the waking god may draw us out to where we can never return." (from *Teaching a Stone to Talk*, Harper & Row, 1982)

Yes, this is no "play it safe" Sunday. Today we celebrate this holy collision of water, Word, and Spirit. In celebrating the baptism of our Lord, we also remember our own baptism, our incorporation into the family of God, and into this wonderful, countercultural, dangerous discipleship journey. By water and Word God named and claimed us and gave us the gift of the Spirit. Nothing should ever be the same again; if it is, if the world is too much with you and you are distracted by worries and concerns then trouble those waters, my friend. Stir it up and remember whose you truly are. Let the grace and the wonder and the expectation wash over you again and again.

From the waters of creation to the waters of the flood, from the Red Sea to the Jordan River, and from the water of Baptism that quenches sin for all eternity to the water that slakes human thirst each day, this elemental substance is both mighty and merciful—the power to destroy and to ensure life. Water, Word, and Spirit are powerful images for this day. See, feel, and taste that the Lord Jesus Christ is near. Yes, Jesus is wherever we gather as a worshiping community, whenever we call on his name, and in, under, and through simple gifts of bread and wine.

May you be drawn out this day from your comfort and your slumber to the center of this holy collision of Word, water, and Spirit. Touch, taste, and see God's goodness and remember the promises of your baptism. Refreshed and renewed, go forth into the world to walk in the light and love of God. You are beloved, so be sure to live like it!...Peace, blessing, and spiritual crash helmets to you and yours!

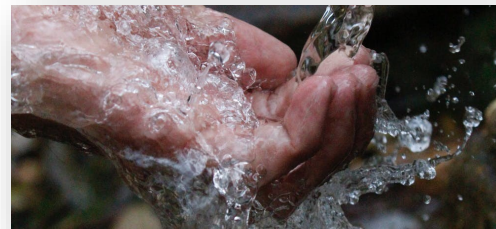
~ Sharron R. Blezard, [Stewardship of Life](#)



For this is Christ's spiritual thirst, his longing in love, which persists and always will until we see him ... Therefore this is his thirst and his longing in love for us, to gather us all here into him, to our endless joy, as I see it. For we are not now so wholly in him as we then shall be. ... We are his bliss, we are his reward, we are his honor, we are his crown. ... For he still has that same thirst and longing which he had upon the Cross, which desire, longing and thirst, as I see it, were in him from without beginning; and he will have this until the time that the last soul which will be saved has come up into his bliss. ... and this is the characteristic of spiritual thirst, which will persist in him so long as we are in need, and will draw us up into his bliss.

~ Julian of Norwich c.1342-c.1416, *Revelations of Divine Love*

Reflecting on the Word



___ 1st Reading: [Genesis 1:1-5](#)

In Genesis 1:1, the Hebrew word that's translated "wind" in the NRSV could also be translated "breath" or "spirit." Try reading the verse each of those ways – does it affect the way we understand it? In what way? When God says "Let there be light," there is light. The phrase "and it was so" is repeated three times. What does this tell us? Does it shed any light on what we are asking for when we say "thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven?" How does that look to us? God "saw that it was good" three times in this part of the story. The Hebrew word "good" can mean a lot of things, from something moral to something well done or fitting, to something lovely. Does it make a difference what we think it means here? What difference? What does this tell us about God? [Matters of Interpretation](#)

___ Psalm Reading: [Psalm 29](#)

Why would a human directly call upon "heavenly beings" (or "angels")? What is it that the writer of this psalms wants the "heavenly beings" to do? Lebanon is considered the mountainous region north of Israel. Sirion is a reference to Mount Hermon in Lebanon & Syria, whose waters flow into the Sea of Galilee. With this in mind, describe both the humorous imagination of verse 6 and its powerful meaning. How do the descriptions about God's voice relate to verses 10-11? In what areas of life do you (or the people you know) need to hear of the truths of these verses? [Ken Castor](#)

Here I am, back at the Jordan. I was here in Advent -- lost, clutching at straws, impressed by a mere reed shaken by the wind, broken and empty. I met a prophet in the desert. YOU ! Turn toward the Holy One, he said. Repent. Accept the forgiveness of your sins and begin a new way. Come into the River, he said. Prepare the way of the Lord, he said.

And now, in Epiphany, at that same river, the prophet baptizes the One who was, who is, who is to come. This One, this man, is manifested in absolute ordinariness. Is this the Good News he speaks of? Utter ordinariness? The sacred unfolding in the mundane? Can hope live in my broken life, raw-fleshed with loss?

A Voice hovers over the face of the waters - as if the man in the river, just like me, must be reassured of this hope also. Beloved. You are my Beloved. What losses await this One manifested so fully in the human condition?

Let me hear the Voice above the waters whispering 'Beloved'. Baptize me into your unseen hope. Call me to go with you into sacred spheres of ordinariness. Heal my poisoned flesh, my diseased soul.

I ask, Where are you staying?

He says, Come and see...

~ Suzanne Guthrie, [At the Edge of Enclosure](#)

Praying Toward Sunday

Almighty God,
Your Spirit swept over the waters of creation;
You are sweeping over us now, creating something new.

Call us away from the distractions of the world to experience what You are doing now, in us, and through us, and in our world.

Open us to a new awakening, a new beginning, where we look through the lens of the goodness of Your creation, experiencing all possibilities in You.

Turn us away from the negative lens, and lead us to the light.

In the name of Jesus, who leads us into life, we pray. Amen.

~ Reverend Mindi, [Rev-o-lution](#)

___ 3rd Reading: [Acts 19:1-7](#)

In following Jesus, what is the balance and the relationship between being changed as a person, and being called to change the world around us? When Paul was coming into a new city to spread the Gospel, why do you think he sought out any local believers first? What does it mean when Paul says "baptism of repentance?" What is repentance, and what role does it play in our becoming followers of Christ? Is repentance – this internal change – the only thing Jesus calls us to? What more are we called to do? What did the Spirit do in these believers in Ephesus? We can assume the Spirit empowered and challenged Paul and these new believers. What was the outcome, despite the obstacles? Repentance calls us to be changed. The Holy Spirit prompts us and gives us power to "be change" in the world. How are these things related? How does being changed naturally lead to changing things? Could we simply stop at repentance? Why or why not? [Faith Element](#)

___ 4th Reading: [Mark 1:4-11](#)

What does baptism mean to you? Why was baptism of repentance significant? What did it mean for John's followers? How does it differ for us today? How was Jesus' arrival anticipated by the people of Israel? What was He anointed for? If Jesus is our King (and not just our friend and companion), how does this change our life and relationship with Him? Jesus was tempted and yet did not give in to temptation. We face temptation as well. What are the resources that we have to rely on in our battle with sin? How often do you think about your baptism? When you do, do you imagine yourself as beloved? [Bethel Community Church, Weekly Seeds](#)