

“With You, I am Well Pleased”

Mark 1: 4-11 (Common English Bible Version)

⁴ John the Baptist was in the wilderness calling for people to be baptized to show that they were changing their hearts and lives and wanted God to forgive their sins. ⁵ Everyone in Judea and all the people of Jerusalem went out to the Jordan River and were being baptized by John as they confessed their sins. ⁶ John wore clothes made of camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist. He ate locusts and wild honey. ⁷ He announced, "One stronger than I am is coming after me. I'm not even worthy to bend over and loosen the strap of his sandals. ⁸ I baptize you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."

Jesus is baptized and tempted

⁹ About that time, Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee, and John baptized him in the Jordan River. ¹⁰ While he was coming up out of the water, Jesus saw heaven splitting open and the Spirit, like a dove, coming down on him. ¹¹ And there was a voice from heaven: "You are my Son, whom I dearly love; in you I find happiness."

As I read this passage from Mark again this year, I was struck by the image of the wilderness. John the Baptist is preaching in the wilderness. Jesus, after he is baptized, is driven into the wilderness to figure out who he is and what it means for him to be the Son of God. As people of faith, we know that a large part of our story is the people of Israel wandering in the wilderness for forty years, discovering and rediscovering their relationship with God. Our faith story tells us that with each part of these wilderness wanderings, there was water, water which the people had to pass through to make it into the "promise land."

This image of passing through the waters is healing. It is renewing. It is refreshing for our weary souls. This image of passing through the waters as we make our way through the wild-ness of our world, through the chaos of our world, as we make our way through the brokenness of our world, this image is restoring. This idea of passing through the waters centers us. Because as people of faith, we know that when we pass through the waters, we get a clearer understanding of who we are and whose we are. We get a deeper understanding of what it means to live as one, together as the Beloved community. When we pass through the water, our call to become the people of love God created and calls us to be is clarified because it reaffirms our relationship with God and with one another.

The very act of passing through the water shows us that our faith is not either or, but rather both. I was reminded of this again this past week when someone helped me reframe this story from the Gospel of Mark. This person pointed out that the waters of the Jordan River do not separate the wilderness from the Promise Land. Rather the water connects the two, bringing them together, making them one, all because the water has the power to transform the journey, has the power to transform our viewpoint, has the power to shift the landscape as it moves across the land, smoothing out the rough places, and softening the hard edges.

Or let me say it this way...I have remained silent on this past week's events, in large part because there are those who have spoken more eloquently than I on what we watched unfold on the Capitol steps. Yet, I would be remiss if I did not take this opportunity to speak...It does not miss my attention that after a year with so much hurt, so much brokenness, with so much pain and sorrow, that on this Sunday, after we watched that hurt, that brokenness, that sorrow become manifest through people's words and actions, that as people of faith, we are being invited to come to the water and hear the good news once more. It does not miss my attention that after a week with so much anger, so much divisiveness, so much hate, that on this Sunday, while all that anger, hate, divisiveness, continue to simmer and bubble, often times spilling over in our conversations and relationships, that we, as a culture, as a society are being invited to come to the water and change our lives, to change our hearts and seek God's forgiveness of our sins. It does not miss my attention that after so much chaos in our lives, in our nation, in our relationships, that on this Sunday, we as a whole are being invited to come to the water, to feel the Spirit of God moving across the water once more as it brings forth light and love.

I do not stand up here and pretend to know all the answers. I fully admit that the events of this past week scared me, disturbed me, and yes continue to worry me. I'm not going to say that this is not who we are as a nation, as a society, as a

culture because that is not true. This is exactly who we are. Our system is designed to keep people oppressed. To keep people divided. To keep churning the chaos.

In the words of our General Minister and President of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), Rev. Terri Hord Owens, “no matter your politics, we have lost our moral compass as a nation, and we need to get really clear about what is morally right.”

It is time for us to pass through the waters once more....to pass through the waters of justice, to pass through the waters of mercy, to pass through the waters of love. To let the waters of community rush down and wash us clean. To let the waters of peace soften the hard places of our hearts. And to smooth out the rough places when injustice and hate continue to reign.

It is time for us to pass through the waters of discipleship, clarifying our call as a movement for wholeness for all of God’s children. It is time to pass through the waters of acceptance once more and remember who we are, to remember whose we are. We are disciples of Christ. We are followers of Jesus, followers of the Prince of Peace, followers of the one who embraced those on the margins and spoke out against those who continued to prop up a broken system for their own gain.

We are a movement for wholeness in a fragmented world, seeking transformation so that all will experience the Kingdom of God here on Earth as it is in Heaven.

In a few moments, we will watch a video filled with everyday images of water sent in by our members. These images of water represent special places along people's faith journey. They represent places of rest and renewal. They represent places where people encountered the presence of God.

These images remind us that at the beginning of our faith story, at the beginning of our journey, at the beginning of our life, there was water. From the waters of the womb, to the waters of the Creation story, to the waters we pass through in our baptism, we are constantly reminded that water is life. Life which is not either or but rather both/and. Life which connects the wilderness and the promise land, which connects the chaos and the peace. Life which renews, which restores, which heals, which smooths out the rough places, which softens the hard edges. Life which springs forth as the Spirit of God continues to move across the water, bringing about the vision of Shalom for all of God's now and forevermore. May it be so. Amen.