

"Continue...Come...Close-r!"

"Pure Delight!"

Isaiah 42:1-9; Matthew 3:13-17

January 12, 2020

Baptism of Our Lord Sunday

Our journey in this new liturgical year so far:

~O Come...away...to the manger.

~O, Come ...Close

~Continue...Come...Close-r!

Through Advent trusting, we found ourselves once again in a Christmas ...stunned to know and embrace this new reality:

Even when we are not able to come to grips with our lives,

Not able or knowing how to come close to

God: Fear Not!

God comes. To Us. Intentionally Close to us...

an unconditional, universal love birthing in us possibility

we never could have conceived of on our own.

To show us the way to continue, this Universal Christ energy is given the human face of Jesus.

And now we begin to let all this settle in a bit with some extraordinary Ordinary Time...a growing, greening time as we Continue the journey coming closer and closer.

So, today, ask yourself:

What exactly is it I AM continuing?

Allowing to continue in my life?

~How does this align with... who I long to be...my authentic

Christmas self?

~Is this what my soul longs to continue?

~Am I willing to consider a different way home to

continue a different aspect of my longing?

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And God says, this is my beloved in whom I delight... and Jesus hadn't even done one act of ministry yet...

he was 33 and hadn't done anything significant yet...

that's personally hope-full!

(Touch the waters in the font)

...Long before the time of John the Baptist, baptism was practiced in Judaism.

Within the Jewish tradition, cleansing was required to enter the temple, a ritual cleansing required of Gentiles who wished to become Jewish.

John, himself a Jew, went far beyond that meaning.
For him, it's not just a matter of cleaning up your act.

It was not just for those who hoped to "join the right religious club".

For John, baptism was a personal choice in how to continue...not about being in or out of any club,
well intentioned or not.

To each one who came to be baptized in the water...Jews and Gentiles, John assertively gave the command
(and the holy permission) to turn their life around...

not to become a clean, blank slate...
but to write something important there for yourself to strive towards in your daily living (*a new way to continue!*).

Turn your life around! Repent! It was about righteousness; right relationship...within and with others.

Now this was not some sweet, religious concept John was trying to put out there amongst the people.

This was a social political act of hopeful living
fortified by faith.

John provided the new socio-political religious act of hope. It was about survival in an oppressive regime.

Later, Jesus would show us the way to live the faith,
with a God connection.

Living baptism in courage bringing energy and support to empower that personal change.

John baptized people in the hope
they could actually survive the oppression of their day...
our day.

John's baptism is about surviving oppressive times.
Baptism as an act of defiance.

How defiant?

Well, if we stand up for integrity in our one baptism,
one person at a time, soon we're all standing.

And if we're standing together, we're going to have the courage to go places together, to
continue, defiantly....

not because we're ordered to or "should" ...
but because we're called!
We're called!

We, too, hear the words:

"You are my beloved in whom I delight!"

How defiant?

John was beheaded by the authorities.
He was a threat to the religious and political status quo.

Haven't you ever had your head handed to you on a platter when you dared to defy the
powers that be
in your home or work or community or church?

But having your head handed to you doesn't stop you from doing what you need to
do...**if**...
you're doing it within the spirit of grace and love,
with a courageous heart of compassion.

There is amazing power if you act from your courageous heart center andlove
yourself...first...and then,
ALL others...all. At the same time.

John lost his head...but that didn't stop the new order...because Jesus followed him to
show the way.

Christ in Jesus came not so we could survive the worlds
we live in, **but that we would upturn them!**

John could only baptize in water...Jesus baptizes into the spirit...and the spirit cannot
be stopped.

Emptied, broken, exhausted at times, yes...
but never stopped.

Just when your spirit feels like a bruised reed,
your voice wants to cry out,
your dimly burning wick is trying not go out,

exactly then....you are invited to remember your baptism
and the heavens do open to you.

There is clarity of intention offered and opportunity to move your life forward.

And you do feel it, if you only will:
God delights in you! God's soul delights in you,
is one with you.

The righteousness that is of God does not force itself into your life or into the world.
Rather, you are to embrace it.

Force is not the answer to what is wrong or unjust with your life or in this world.

We cannot forcibly pave over what is wrong with good intentions, even if the intention
is justice and righteousness.

The ends don't justify the means....ever!

Embrace your baptism.
As Presbyterians,
we don't take new names at our baptisms.

For each time we find our own true spirit, we are re-named...
We hear the "voice" and the heavens open to us again!

Loved, we are able to turn our lives around. Oh my!
What are we getting ourselves into here?!

(As if hearing a Voice...)
So, are you hearing any voices lately?

Lots of voices out there, lots of noise.

If it's God's voice, then revealed in you at a deep, basic level is God's delight in you...an
abiding oneness within,
that enables so much new in us...to continue!

God's voice calls forth your embrace of inner and outer justice....but not through power over...

bulldozing through, others expendable.

God's voice calls you to be a new you
without having to "cry out or lift up your voice,
or make it heard in the street;
without bruising even a reed,
or extinguishing the light of a single wick.

A new you without forcing it on you or you on others!

Gentle but powerful,
Jesus' ways are not the ways of the world.

The way justice comes into being
is just as important as the justice that it brings.

No one is expendable.
Courage and power through truth and kindness.

Holiness incarnate comes not to brow beat us...but guide us.

We have been given breath and spirit.

God takes you by the hand and keeps you....
you are on fire to be all you can be.

What is blind in you will see,
what is imprisoned will be brought out,
what is in darkness brought into the light.

As this is done for you,
you are to do this for others...

or perhaps that's the other way around...
actually both for they are inseparable!

Perhaps you can't have one without the other:
Justice for any without justice for all.
Freedom for any without freedom for all.

YOU can actually do something new with your life...standing up to the culture and politics and church of our time!

Christmas time isn't for a day, or 12 days, but a life-time!

We live the good news of Christmas.

We *continue* to live it forward...

and begin to trust it and wonder what will happen next...

more will continue to come.

See: the former things have come to pass and new things are declared.

Hey! This is really radical stuff! It is a radical change for each of us to think of ourselves as beloved, as delightful, as able.....as baptized.

We are God's people, radically traditional...
baptized "into" the Spirit to:

Think more clearly, Feel more deeply,

Speak more truthfully, Love more extravagantly,

Serve more creatively, Give more lavishly,

Live more fully ...and...

Stand up for righteousness/justice/right relationship
with grace and compassion...

This is not some Holy Hocus Pocus!
Baptism is the really real!

And we are to *continue...to come...close-r* and closer

to our God, to our truest selves...
to be pure delight...and more fully human.

You choose what it is you want to continue...

Listen to this: Centuries ago people looked to magic in order to protect themselves and affect their worlds for a change. Amulets and incantations, special potions and rituals as protection against the perceived powers of darkness. Before the Reformation, the alters in the Catholic Church (from whence we come) were turned around away from the people, the Mass was often understood to have its own sense of magic power...as if Christ was about magic and not the power of love.

A remnant of the language of the Mass of that time still resides in our language today...as if we still believe in the power of magic over the power of love. Each time a magician waves her wand and declares “hocus-pocus”, she is intoning an ancient sacred phrase derived from the Latin words the priest chanted as he raised the bread and wine into the incensed air. The priest declared, “Hoc est corpus meum”. (This is my body) But as the masses in the large cathedrals repeated this phrase, it sounded more like “hocus-pocus”. They may really have believed there was a magic afoot that came through the priest and changed things...protected them...and so they called upon the phrase to protect them and change their reality in life situations...missing the point of faith completely...there is no magic power out there to protect anyone. The power is in here, in each of us...power enough to change everything...no magic needed.

They had it partly right. It is right to recognize the power of the Holy Spirit to change things...it is the greatest protective power we can call upon. But it is not magic and is not evoked by a pastor. It is evoked by each one of us...YOU!...when you live “into” a new spirit...find your own right spirit. YOU are empowered by the grace and love of a God that calls you beloved and delights in you. No magic! YOU can actually do something new with your life...standing up to the culture and politics and church of our time!