

Pastor Jon's Sermon from January 10, 2021

Based on Mark 1:4-11

“The Baptism of our Lord”

What do our scriptures offer us today after we witnessed the horrible assault on the US Capitol on Wednesday? The fact that five people died, and many others were injured, should cause us to stop and say Lord Have Mercy.

In the aftermath, questions this riot are being made to a Black Lives Matter protest that happened months earlier in Washington D.C. Why were the two marches treated so differently with more police presence and police in riot gear protecting the US Capitol than for the Black Lives Matter protest? Wednesday, unfortunately, has revealed the depths of our human sinfulness, double standards, white privilege, and the ugly divisions in our country. Instead of boiling under the surface and on social media, the anger and rage manifested itself into this chaotic attack on the People's House.

So back to my initial question, what do our scriptures offer us today? In Genesis 1, when God created the heavens and earth, “<sup>2</sup>the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep.” Some scholars refer to this time before creation as a watery chaos. Then a wind from God swept over the face of the waters. Wind in the original Hebrew of the Old Testament can also be translated as breath or spirit. I will translate wind as Spirit here. The Spirit of God moved over the waters of Chaos. Then God spoke a word, “Let there be light”; and there was light. <sup>4</sup>And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness.”

With a Word, accompanied by the Holy Spirit, God did a new thing. God brought order to chaos. God created the heavens and the earth out of out of a formless void... creation out of nothing. This is good news to us today. God can take a formless void... a chaotic mess, and bring order to it. As a result, God's word combined with the Holy Spirit can do a new thing in our lives and in our world. God continues to do a new thing in all of us through the Word and Holy Spirit. We

can cling to God's Word at a time like this for hope and a foundation to build our lives on.

Then in our Gospel for today we encounter Jesus' Baptism by John in the Jordan River. John is out in the wilderness preaching and preparing the way for the messiah to come on the scene. People from all Judea and Jerusalem were coming out to be baptized by John in the Jordan River. Recall that John's baptism was a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. Repentance in the original Greek Language of the New Testament is the word *Metanoia*. "Meta" meaning "change", and "noia" meaning "mind." To change your mind or to transform your mind. I like the translation... "To turn around and take hold of something better," according to Karoline Lewis in a continuing Education event I attended this week.

Our country and we as individuals need to enter into a time of National repentance... to turn around and take hold of something better.

In Jesus' baptism, as he was coming up out of the waters, the heavens were torn open and the Spirit of God descends on Jesus like a dove. Where have we seen the word torn apart in scriptures? When the temple curtain was torn in two when Jesus was crucified. Where have we seen a dove before? In Genesis in the flood story. A dove had a leaf in its mouth when the flood subsided and it was safe to leave the ark. This is a symbol of new creation and peace.

Then as Jesus comes out of the waters, the voice of God says, "You are my Son, the beloved; with you I am well pleased." Jesus' baptism connects heaven and earth. Jesus receives the Holy Spirit in his baptism. He is affirmed as God's beloved Son.

I find this significant that, Jesus, God in human flesh, the savior of the world, entered the same waters of baptism as we do. Even though we know Jesus was without sin, his first public act as the messiah is to identify with us sinners in every way. Jesus shares our humanity in every way. In his public ministry, Jesus condemned injustice and lifted up those who were bowed down. On the cross Jesus identifies not only with us sinners, but with all who suffer. God is with us now as we suffer.

In our baptism, God has done a new thing in us. We too received the Holy Spirit. God calls us His beloved children. We are called to follow Jesus' path of justice and peace. What I saw on Wednesday doesn't reflect the Jesus I know.

Luther teaches in the small catechism that Baptism promises us protection from death and the devil and the gift of eternal life. Simple water combined with God's Word has the power to save us and give us abundant life.

At this time of Lament in our nation's history, let us take hold of our baptismal promises, trust in a God who can order chaos, and exhibit the fruit of the Holy Spirit in Galatians 5: Love, joy peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.