

Mark 1:4-11 – Baptism of Our Lord

January 10, 2021

Peace in Christ – Elizabeth, CO

Grace and peace be with you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

So, today we are celebrating Jesus' baptism, and I know that it may seem like a weird thing – for Jesus to be baptized when he is the one who gives us the Holy Spirit in baptism - but Jesus goes as God wills him and he is baptized in the River Jordan by John.

Now. Why is that significant? Well - there are two things that are being proclaimed in Jesus' baptism. 1 – God enters our history, our story. God stands in solidarity with us. 2 – God calms the waters of chaos in order to give us life.

Accompaniment and peace. That's what God gives us through Jesus Christ our Lord.

That's the good news in today's Gospel reading, and maybe that's all you need to hear today. God is not far off and aloof. God is here. God joins us right where we are and God calms the chaos that is surrounding us.

Through Jesus, God brings us peace – the peace that surpasses all human understanding – the peace of forgiveness and reconciliation. Peace, which is the total opposite of wrath.

In the waters of the Jordan River, Jesus enters our time. He becomes part of our chronology. Part of our seconds, minutes, hours, days, years, decades, centuries, and eons. Through Christ, God joins us physically in our time and place.

It's not that God hasn't always been a part of our history, it's just that in Jesus God, the infinite, is made finite as a real human being who walks with us, talks with us, and heals us.

As the heavens are torn apart, ripped apart, and the Holy Spirit descends from heaven, it is being made clear to us that there is no separation between us and God. The barrier has been destroyed.

As you may know, if you have ever tried to mend a tear, you can never put it back to the way it was. You can sew it or put a patch on it, but the tear will always be there. Always. It's permanent. So, never ever think that God is not here with us.

And as the Spirit sweeps over the face of the Jordan River to join Jesus, we are reminded of the waters of Genesis 1 when God's Spirit swept over the face of the waters of chaos in order to bring forth all of creation – in order to bring life.

God's spirit in the midst of chaos brings life.

Before God's Spirit joined the waters and calmed the chaos at creation, there was no life. God's Spirit, or breath, brings life to troubled waters.

In the River Jordan, as Jesus is baptized, we have God's Word, the Spirit, and water bringing forth new life. In Jesus, there is new life for all of creation.

In Jesus, God becomes creation and is fully immersed into creation. God joins us in our time and in our place.

God does that so that we will have peace and life, eternal life, life which is forever tied to our Creator. Because God exists, we exist. Because God is life, we have life. Because God is our comfort, we have peace.

And in the waters of our baptism, we remember – God is part of our story and that God alone calms chaos, and when the Spirit is working in us, we bring calm in the midst of chaos as God's hands, feet, and voices in the world.

As we know from Wednesday, people seem to thrive on stirring up chaos.

When we seek our own power and righteousness, chaos ensues. But, through our reconciliation with God, we know peace.

As I watched the news reports on Wednesday and then saw the pictures on Thursday, I didn't feel anger. I only felt lament.

As I looked at the faces of many of the people who stormed the Capital, I saw real hurt, pain, and desperation. These people had been caught up in the turmoil of chaos and it resulted in violence. This past week I have really understood Jesus lament over Jerusalem as he wept.

I have also been weeping for us. Sometimes that's the best prayer we can offer. It's an acknowledgement that things are out of control and only God can fix them.

For a long time I have been joining Jesus in his prayer on the cross – Father, forgive us, for we do not know what we are doing.

In the swirling waters of chaos, up becomes down, right becomes wrong, love becomes hate, and relationships are destroyed.

When I became a pastor almost 14 years ago, I had no idea just how biblical the times are, and perhaps every pastor who has come before me has thought that as well, because God is part of our history, the bible is not outside of our reality, so of course all times are biblical.

But, again, the good news is that God enters our history and brings us calm in the midst of chaos.

And so, in baptism, we have been given a precious gift. It has been placed on our foreheads and it can never be washed away. No matter what happens, good or bad, we should always trace that mark and remember that we are baptized into Jesus' death and resurrection.

We are a death and resurrection people. Chaos does not have the final say – life does. So instead of drowning, we sail.

We don't give up, because we can't give up. The Holy Spirit has been gifted to us. So, in the midst of chaos, we seek justice and peace, not just for ourselves, but for the whole world.

And you'll notice that justice comes before peace, and this justice is God's justice, which has nothing to do with revenge. This justice is about tearing down the boundaries that keep people oppressed. It's about stopping the infliction of pain and not being a part of it, and when we do find ourselves being a part of it to repent and turn back to God.

In the River Jordan, Jesus is sitting right in the middle of two boundaries – a boundary on land and one between heaven and earth. It's quite cruciform if you think about it. + heaven/earth, between lands, or people.

Through Jesus' life, death, and resurrection, boundaries are destroyed so that peace can be known in the world.

And so Jesus is killed. He doesn't kill anyone, but that's not the end of the story. Jesus is brought back to life, because God's healing love can never be destroyed. Chaos is never the end of the story.

And so, in baptism we drown in the waters of chaos, the waters of sin and death, only to be brought back to life in God's love, which we are sent to share in the world.

As we reaffirm our baptismal covenants today, may you be encouraged as you hear God say to you – you are my beloved. You are God’s beloved and when we follow God’s will of love and peace, when we follow Jesus, God is well pleased with us, because that is the mission into which we are baptized.

Thanks be to God. Amen.