

The Baptism of Jesus
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Genesis 1: 1-5
Psalm 29
Acts of the Apostles 19: 1-7
Mark 1: 4-11

It is unfortunate that so often there is an attempt to make the Bible into a science book; unfortunate because in so doing the whole breadth and depth of the Scripture gets lost in an endless debate that misses the intention and meaning of the beginning of the book of Genesis. The book of Genesis does not seek to explain molecules or galaxies, the law of gravity or the motion of the universe. Rather the book of Genesis seeks to give us a glimpse of the awesome power of God in relationship, using the dramatic scene of the condition of the earth. The earth was formless and desolate, so much so that the waters of the ocean raged – it is a condition of chaos much like we can imagine the oceans churning in the middle of a hurricane. And upon this chaos comes the power of God, the spirit of God – and as this spirit works upon the chaos, out of it comes order and direction and purpose. Indeed wherever God’s Spirit is present, there seems to be this result – a purposeful order of things that gives meaning and direction to life. God’s Spirit, powerful and wise, makes sense out of a universe that, without that Spirit, is in total disarray and confusion.

As the story of the book of Genesis unfolds we see how that Spirit of God continues to shape and mold the universe until finally the man and the woman are created, placed in this ideal creation and given the opportunity to experience and to enjoy what has been created for them. Order, perfection, harmony and peace – these are the distinctive traits of God’s creation. Everything is in a balanced relationship with everything else.

But chaos is not totally obliterated and remains a threat. When the man and the woman listen to a voice other than the Spirit of God, sin or evil begins to break the harmony and the perfect relationship of God’s creation. The history of humanity, then, becomes this struggle between God’s power and human sin – between order and chaos. The Biblical story is not scientific, but a history of faith and God’s attempts to restore the harmony and order of the creative process.

In the midst of this struggle comes One who shows us what it means to live in perfect relationship, to live by the guidance of the Spirit – Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus comes to be baptized in the Jordan River by John, not because of His own sin, but rather to identify with all those who, because of sin, fall short of God’s intention. Indeed we might say that because Jesus chose to live by God’s Spirit, God’s presence was confirmed at the time of Jesus’ baptism in the Jordan by appearing to Him in the form of a dove. It was this significant

event that served the purpose of helping Jesus to receive the identity, the support and the sense of mission that would be necessary for Him to carry out God's will for His life.

Jesus would be tempted and challenged, even as we are tempted and challenged. He would experience every struggle and torment that you and I might ever have to deal with. He would face loneliness, the hostility of others, the pain of desertion, just as you and I sometimes feel these as well. But God's Spirit would remain with Him because Jesus was open to receiving that Spirit and allowing it to both guide His living and give Him order within Himself.

This seems to be the key to understanding the mystery of our baptism. It is not the amount of water that is used, whether it be by sprinkling on the head or a total immersion of the body. It is not whether baptism is done as an infant or as an adult. Baptism simply identifies us with God. In the struggle between order and chaos, between God's Spirit and sin, between good and evil, through baptism we place our trust in God's continuing presence, the Spirit, to guide and to direct us – to give us meaning and purpose for life itself. In baptism, God's Spirit makes its claim upon us. Through the Spirit we are promised that, as we allow the Spirit to be part of our lives, that Spirit will be present with us.

Allowing our lives to be led by the Spirit is quite different from trying to do it all ourselves. The Spirit allows us to affirm our humanity, to admit our weaknesses, even to say that there are times when we are afraid. The Spirit frees us from the pride that enslaves us, the bitterness that eats away at us, the jealousy that threatens our self-destruction. The Spirit gives us a sense of purpose and order in the midst of a world that often seems to lack direction and is threatened by chaos.

God's Spirit – available to you and to me freely, as we are willing to receive it – as we open our lives to allow that Spirit in. Just as we have to open the doors and the windows of our homes to all the fresh air to circulate, so we need to open the door to our hearts and the windows of our minds so that the Spirit might refresh and renew us. If we are waiting for the Spirit to break through the barriers and the resistance we have created; if we are waiting for some dramatic demonstration of the Spirit while we go along in life, saying, "Well, if God really wants me, then God will change me," we are only resisting that power of God. The question is not if God's Spirit is present, but rather are we open to receiving that Spirit? Are we willing to be led by the Spirit? That is the age old question. Adam and Eve failed, and the consequence of their failure was sin. As we block the Spirit's work in our lives, so we allow the power of sin to rule over us as well. What our

Savior Jesus Christ assures us by both His own baptism in the Jordan and His life and ministry, is that as we follow His example of being led by the Spirit, we will experience God's presence to strengthen us for our journey of faith.

This same Spirit empowers us to be God's people at work in the world; it is not given simply to comfort us, but as a means by which we will witness to God's presence. This morning we ordain and install new Consistory members as part of the governing body of this congregation. And we pray for the Spirit to guide and direct their participation in making decisions and we pray for the Spirit to give them wisdom in their words and their deliberations for the good, not only of Trinity but God's Church as a whole. It is that same Spirit that empowers and enlivens us as we go about serving God's will in our living. Whether that is to be a Sunday School teacher, a member of the Altar Guild, involved with the Called to Care program, one of the people on the Search Committee of Trinity, a greeter or an usher – however we serve, we rely on God's Spirit to be present. The presence of the Spirit engages us so that we know what we are doing is more than merely a task or function to be completed, and in experiencing that Spirit we will find fulfillment in whatever it is that we are doing. We will not tire of it nor get bored or find it tedious for that Spirit will encourage and fill us with all that is needful. As you go about whatever you do, we would do well to be open to God's Spirit.

Today's Scripture calls us to re-examine our lives – to honestly evaluate if we have resisted God's Spirit and refused to allow ourselves to be led by that Spirit. Have we sought to go our own way, to go it alone? Or have we been open; have we honestly sought the direction and the meaning of life that the Spirit offers? Are the doors and windows of our souls and minds open to the guidance of that Spirit, wherever that may lead us?

Let us, above all things, pray for such openness – for truly it will help us to make sense, to find purpose, to give meaning to our lives.