

January 8, 2023
Baptism of Jesus

Meditation: "Outside the Box"

20 times since my ordination have I read the lessons for baptism of Jesus Sunday. 19 times have I chosen to focus on one of the three slightly different variations of the baptism of Jesus contained in the gospel lessons. And yet, there are other lessons for each of the three years of the cycle for the revised common lectionary. There is an Old Testament lesson, a Psalm, and an Epistle for each of the three years. This year, I determined, I will get out of the box of reading the gospel lesson about the baptism of Jesus, and focus on one of the other readings.

If I've read it 20 times since my ordination, in your lifetime you've heard it preached 50, 60, 70, 80 times. You know the story by heart by now. Jesus goes out to see John the baptizer out at the Jordan river. John winds up baptizing Jesus, and then the Spirit descends on him, and a voice says he is God's beloved. But why is *he* God's beloved? What makes *him* any different than a thousand others at the riverside? What is so special about this one human being that God sets him apart from all others?

Here is my servant, whom I uphold,
my chosen, in whom my soul delights;
I have put my spirit upon him;
he will bring forth justice to the nations.

As much as I believe that Isaiah was writing to a different audience at a different time and in different circumstances, we can also read into it the answer about who Jesus was and is. He has been called, by God, to the most difficult of ministries – to bring forth justice to the nations. If justice is needed, then surely justice must have been lacking in the world. Now that I think of it, it's sort of like it is right now when one nation can simply decide to attack a neighbour, with no provocation whatsoever, and then proceed to kill civilians and destroy civilian infrastructure, like power supply and water treatment and hospitals, at will; or another nation can kill its own citizens who oppose the government's policies; or another nation can actively work to dismantle the checks and balances in place that are needed to keep democracy functioning.

And not only is Jesus called to a difficult ministry, but justice will be brought about in an entirely different way than the way most leaders try to bring about justice – if you can call it that. Instead of using coercion, backed up with the threat of armed force:

He will not cry out or lift up his voice
or make it heard in the street;
a bruised reed he will not break,
and a dimly burning wick he will not quench;
he will faithfully bring forth justice.

And Jesus will persevere until justice has been wrought, or until death, whichever comes first:

He will not grow faint or be crushed
until he has established justice in the earth,
and the coastlands wait for his teaching.

What I'd like to know, is where is God's anointed one now, in 2023? Maybe we ought to all run down to the creek, or the river, or the beach at Port Stanley and see if we can find him or her. Or maybe we just have to look as far as the font, and remember our own baptism. Just like Jesus, at our baptism we too received the Holy Spirit. Just like Jesus, God blessed us too, and called us to our own unique ministry. If the Isaiah passage can work in Isaiah's time, and in Jesus' time, it can also work in our time. Who knows, perhaps it is one of you who are called to a ministry of peacemaking or delivering justice, for

Thus says God, the LORD,
I have called *you* in righteousness;
I have taken *you* by the hand and kept you;
I have given *you* as a covenant to the people,
a light to the nations,
to open the eyes that are blind,
to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon,
from the prison those who sit in darkness.

The baptism we witnessed here this morning was more than just the sprinkling of some water and the smearing of some oil. The baptism we witnessed here this morning was also about God calling Sully to a special ministry – what that ministry may be, we will have to wait to discover. And, not only did God call Sully, but God also blessed Sully, empowering him, giving him the gifts and skills needed to take up that ministry. And no less than God has done so with Jesus and with Sully, God has done so with each and every one of us here.

We need to start thinking outside of the comfortable little boxes we have created for ourselves. We need to stop waiting for God to come like some bolt of lightning from the blue, and cleaning up the mess we've made of the place. We need to understand that God has called each one of us to be part of the solution to the problems we are faced with as a society and as a species, And God has empowered each of us, given us all that we need, to fulfill our own individual callings.

So go from this place and pay attention to the people and circumstances you would normally ignore. Look for God in the places of light and in the places of darkness in this community, and around the world. You will find God there, both serving, and being served. Perhaps you may even be God's anointed one to someone you meet, or be served by someone who is God's anointed one to you. God is rarely to be found inside the box we put God in, so look outside the box.