

Sunday January 11, 2026

Baptism of Jesus

Sermon: “Pop Goes The Weasel”

When I was a young child, I had a Jack-in-the-box. I’m sure you all remember those. You turned the crank and it played a tune (sing All Around the Mulberry Bush) and when you got to ‘pop’, Jack would pop out of the box. But then the box broke. Jack would pop out at any time during the song. You never knew when Jack would pop out. He was unpredictable, uncontrollable.

It was a considerable hike down to the Jordan. When he left Jerusalem at dawn there was a chill in the air, yet, as he had descended the mountain, the sun had risen and now, at mid-morning, he could feel the heat of the sun. The walk down the mountain road was a long one, treacherous in places. He was glad to finally be off it and entering the rocky scrubland that lay between the mountain and the river. But this part of the road held its own dangers. There were often thieves and other ne’er-do-wells who holed up in this uninviting land. Yet, there seemed to be many people making the journey from Jerusalem out to the Jordan today, scribes and Pharisees and Sadducees included.

“Where is God today?” his neighbour had asked him a week ago as they worshipped at the temple. ‘The priests are here, but the ritual suddenly seems so structured. It feels sterile, void of life.’ And then they heard about this man, John, who was baptising people in the Jordan. They heard that crowds were going out to him there. There was something happening at the river. He just had to go and see for himself.

As he stood on the banks of the river, he watched John lower a man into the water and then bring him back up. And then something strange happened. An apparition floated down, somewhat like a bird, and settled on the man. And then there was a voice, “This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased.” Well pleased indeed, what had he done that any of them hadn’t

done? But there was something different about this man, something different about his countenance.

And then his neighbour's question returned, "Where is God today?" God is in the river; he just came up from under the water. God just floated down from above and alighted on the man standing in the water. God just spoke words of blessing.

That was then and this is now, and still the question remains, 'Where is God today?' With church memberships aging and dwindling, and sanctuaries closing all across Canada, it is a good question to ask, 'Where is God today?' As church attendance dwindles, the sale of books about Spirituality are booming, and mainstream booksellers, like Chapters and Indigo, are enlarging the Spirituality sections of their stores to meet demand. It seems that as fewer people attend worship services regularly, there is a growing Spiritual hunger. And it's not just exhibiting itself in book sales, either. The latest article I read was about a phenomenon in the Southern Baptist Church in the US. You know, the largest denomination there. The youth are leaving in droves. The reason is that they have started thinking critically. They compare what they were taught in Sunday School about Jesus, and they compare that to the behaviour of and the messages their elders are giving. "Love thy neighbour, but only if he is white. If he is black or Hispanic, he is a threat." You know, messages like that. The youth see this hypocrisy and their response is to leave the church. But they are not leaving their faith in God. What they are doing is starting new... congregations I suppose is the right word. They are gathering with others who see and reject the hypocrisy to worship and to grow and deepen their faith. Where is God? NOT in the Southern Baptist Church, they have decided.

So, where is God today? The Sadducees and Pharisees were sure that God was in the temple, and only in the temple, where they could control access to Him. Yet, God was seen standing, dripping wet, in the middle of the river. God was seen descending and alighting on a newly baptised person. God was even heard, speaking words of blessing. God was in both the temple on the

mountain top, and in the river valley; in Jerusalem, and outside of Jerusalem. The Sadducees and Pharisees were terrified. God's presence outside the temple meant that they weren't in control.

Today, the same seems to be true. God is not restricted to the place we gather to worship on Sunday mornings. God is in the bookstores, in the private residences of people who have made altars and prayer or meditation rooms, in the workplace, in the hospitals, in the coffee shops where we gather to find community, in the observatories and other temples of science. God is everywhere.

God isn't the one stuck in the box, we are. We are stuck in a box of our own creation.... a box called fear. It is fear that is holding us in bondage. For too long the church has said that if you want to get to know God you have to come to church and you must live the way we tell you to. But the Christian faith is not about believing the right things and behaving in certain ways. It's first and foremost about knowing and enjoying God in all things. It's primarily about relationship, our relationship with God, and our relationship with our fellow human beings and with the rest of creation, and that relationship happens not just Sunday morning at church, but every minute of every day, in every place we find ourselves. We want to keep God in the church and convince people to come to church to meet God, but God seems to be saying to us now, what God said to the priests, the Pharisees, the Sadducees all those years ago in the temple, I'm already outside of the box!

We can stay in the box of fear and death, or we can move beyond it and find something new; we can find life and freedom. I don't mean freedom in the sense that we can do whatever we want, but freedom to serve God by serving God's creation, including, perhaps especially, the people God created who we don't like or who we fear. We need to be better at making the introduction outside of our Sunday morning worship space to the people we meet in the market and the workplace, remembering that we are all God's beloved.

Go, seek 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 hands and feet to someone you meet, or be served by someone who is God's hands and feet to you. Amen.