

The BAPTISM of CHRIST

Isaiah 43: 1-7
Psalm 29
Acts 8: 14-17
Luke 3: 15-17, 21-22

+ + +

Over forty years ago, I spent the summer in Israel.
I was a young naive college student, just finished my freshman year,
and had never been outside the US,
and certainly never been on an airplane.
When we got to JFK airport in NYC,
I decided that when my group went to the bathroom
I would go to the bathroom, whether I had to or not;
when they went to buy a soda, I would too,
whether or not I was thirsty.
I didn't want to be alone and get lost, or worse, miss my flight.
By the end of the summer, I had, like any college student,
run out of money, and so I decided to come home early,
using the upcoming birth of my first nephew as an excuse,
plus my best friend back home was moving 7 states away.
I end up at the Tel Aviv airport 14 hours before my flight -
alone, and again, because I was afraid of missing my flight.
Now Tel Aviv airport is just a tiny bit smaller than JFK -
well, quite a bit smaller,
so little chance of my getting lost or missing my flight.
But I sat there for 14 hours, mostly reading, and nodding
and checking my ticket, over and over, sitting alone on a bench.
Back to back on the next bench came three young women,
Jewish college students from their conversation,
and I got caught up in their conversation about -
What?!?
The Holy Spirit.
We shared our thoughts about and experiences with God -
3 Jewish girls and one Lutheran soon to be religion major.
And we sat and talked excitedly about God's Spirit for over an hour.
God, the Holy Spirit,
completely skipping over Jesus Christ.
God's Spirit of Creation was where we started,
and we continued with the power of God's Spirit
and the gifts given to us through that same Spirit
Creating and re-Creating us.
Today we rehearse the Gospel story of John the Baptist
which we heard not a month ago.

We should probably focus on Jesus -
calling, anointing, blessing, commissioned.
But like those many years ago,
I want to skip, literally over Jesus' head
and consider that Holy Spirit,
even though this is not the feast of Pentecost
when the faithful receive Jesus' promised gift of the Holy Spirit.

Naming, calling, anointing, blessing, commissioning -
the themes for today.

The story in the beginning of the Acts of the Apostles
of that first Pentecost is quoted in our new book, *Walk in Love*
which several of us are reading in preparation
for our own Confirmation and anointing of the Holy Spirit.

The author of that particular chapter of the book observes:

Through the power of the Holy Spirit, people devoted themselves to prayer and fellowship, gave sacrificially to those in need, had generous hearts, and praised God. Yes, the Holy Spirit is dangerous and demanding, because the Holy Spirit inspires conversion and change, and change is always hard and scary! And yet, the results of a life lived through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit are awe-inspiring..."

In fact, scripture tells us that we can see, visibly and powerfully, when people's lives are filled with the Holy Spirit... Disciples of Jesus, who receive the Holy Spirit that God promised, should stand out from the crowd. Through the presence of the Holy Spirit, we are empowered to live lives that show forth to the world these fruits, this love and joy and generosity.

Gunn & Wilson-Shobe: *Walk in Love: Episcopal Beliefs and Practices*, pp.293-4

Yes, we are to stand out in the crowd.
God already has his spotlight on us.

I could be heretical and suggest that Jesus' Baptism does nothing
without our own Baptism
and acceptance of the Holy Spirit's descent upon each one of us
hearing God call us by name, as Isaiah proclaims,
and taking upon us the commission placed upon us.

Jesus did not stay kneeling in the Jordan River.

I wish that next Sunday we would get the Gospel for the 1st Sunday in Lent
when right after today's Baptism,

Jesus is led by that same Holy Spirit into the Wilderness of Temptation.
Jesus doesn't start his ministry as we might suspect next week [Sunday]
with his first miracle,
there is a dark middle road between his receiving the Holy Spirit
and his preaching and healing and performing miracles
in God's name.

Yet we'll put off that dark 40 days of Lent for Lent itself.
For the point I'd like to make is that
 Jesus doesn't just get up out of the water
 and head to a celebration party with cake in the parish hall.
Jesus accepts the Holy Spirit and begins his ministry,
 fulfilling his calling,
 setting for us the example of faithful lives.

Now that I have electricity in my attic library,
 I've gotten books out of bags on the floor and placed on shelves.
Organizing them this week, I've gotten to the section on Spirituality
 with three shelves of volumes about living the Spiritual life.
I probably should have read them all before writing this sermon.
But in *Walk in Love*, Gunn and Wilson-Shobe remind us that
 God's Spirit working in and through us provides the power
 to do the will of God with holy gifts.
 "Through the presence of the Holy Spirit," they write, "we are empowered to live lives
 that show forth to the world these fruits: [the fruit of the Spirit, St. Paul writes, is love,
 joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.]"
 The fruits of the Spirit are the visible signs of a life that is lived through the power of
 God.

and

Through the power of the Holy Spirit, the disciples were able to do things that they did
not imagine possible without God's power – preaching prophetically [*not like this one*],
sharing generously, praying constantly, and serving joyfully.

Ibid. p.294

We will hear more about those gifts of the Spirit
 as we come once again to share the feast of Pentecost.
In the mean-time, I invite you to come along to the River
 and don't hesitantly tip your toe into the swirling current,
 don't just wade in the water,
 but dive into it, shouting, "Woo Hoo!"
For remember,
 one of the fruit of the Spirit is joy.

Those three young, and cute, Jewish girls and this young college lad?
We never exchanged names let alone contact information.
But we did exchange something greater -
 a deeper understanding of our own faith,
 through the sharing of our own faith with others,
 and receiving unto ourselves the gift of "Other."

AMEN.

CHILDREN'S SERMON

a radio or CD player and a pack of new batteries.

(Hold up radio to your ear.)

I don't know what's wrong, I can't hear anything.
Maybe I should check the batteries.
Oh, that's the problem.
There's no batteries.

(Put new batteries in, then hold up to your ear again.)
There's still something wrong. I know the batteries are good,
I just bought them.

Oh! I need to turn on the switch?
Nobody told me that. I guess I should read the instruction book.

(turn the switch on and let music play for a bit)

You know we have an instruction book for life, too. The Bible.
And we have power inside us, like batteries. The Holy Spirit.
But you know the problem?
Many of us forget to read the instructions, and to check the batteries,
and turn on the switch.
And after a while, the power dies, like an old crusted battery.

Let's pray: Jesus, we know that when we were Baptized the Holy Spirit was promised to us. Help us to use the gift and the power of your Holy Spirit to make music in our lives and for all to enjoy.
AMEN.