

First Sunday after Epiphany
Sunday, January 13, 2013
Being at Home with God: Revealing God's Presence
Isaiah 43:1-7; Luke 3:15-17, 21-22

On this first Sunday after Epiphany, we give focus to the baptism of Jesus.

In our Luke text – we see two baptisms – one a water baptism by John and the second a Spirit baptism – the Spirit being poured out upon Jesus.

In Jesus being baptized, many of us cannot help but think about our own experiences of being baptized.

In our community, our regular practice is baptizing outdoors, in water of varying temperature – and it involves full immersion.

Immersion is more than getting wet.
As the water surrounds us we are engulfed by water.

Likewise, our being baptized into Jesus, is to be surrounded, engulfed, and embraced by Jesus.

It is a being immersed in Jesus, being immersed in the Spirit, a being immersed in the presence of God.

It is an all encompassing identifying with Jesus Christ in our lives.

Actually, there is a third baptism of Jesus, though not described as such, but a baptism nonetheless.
It is a baptism that preceded both his water and Spirit baptisms – and it is a baptism that grows out of what is expressed in our Isaiah text.

Something of God is revealed in the today's text from the prophet Isaiah;
Something of God's character.

Through the prophet Isaiah, God tells us that we are God's.

God created us, God formed us
– we are created for God's glory.

But there is more than that
– **God names us**
– God knows our name
– we are personal to God
– not nameless beings.

God knowing our name places God in relationship with us
– we are personal to God and God is personal to us.

Just as Moses asked for God's personal name in Exodus 3, God knows each of us by our names too.

God says: "I have summoned/called you by name; you are mine"

But there is even more than that
– God not only created us
– God not only calls us by name;
God is with us – God embraces us,
God never leaves us alone
How does God show this?

God shows this by reminding us of God’s presence with us through the difficult times we have experienced as the people of God.

“When you pass through the waters I will be with you.”

God remembers the Exodus, the people of God crossing the Red Sea, fleeing from bondage under Pharaoh.

God recounts the entrance into the Promised Land, the people of God crossing the River Jordan
– “and when you pass through the rivers they will not sweep over you.”

God recounts the Exile, the colleagues of Daniel in Babylon being thrown into the fiery furnace
– “when you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze.”

God recounts all these experiences to remind us of something – that God is with us.

Remember this: It is God’s nature to be with us!

And so God says, that God will move nations and all creation to restore us, to recreate us – **because we are precious and honored in God’s sight**
But again, there is more than that in this text about God
– **because we hear God saying to us: “I love you.”**

God encounters us, God embraces us, **because God loves us,**

God loves each one of us, God loves you, God loves me
– let that sink in.

The stories told of water, of fire are stories of God being with us, and why is God with us?
– **because God loves us!**

How do we remember our stories; how do we tell the stories we tell?
– of water, of fire, of hardship, of disease, of struggle in our lives?
– do we tell them in such a way which reveals God being with us in the midst of them?
– God being with us, prompted by God’s love for us?

Or, **do we have a hard time seeing God with us?**
God loving us?
Particularly in the midst of our difficult times?

God knows that indeed we do have a hard time seeing God in the midst of our lives
– **and so we are reminded of the first baptism of Jesus**
– the baptism that precedes Jesus’ baptism in water and his baptism in the Spirit.

Jesus' first baptism is most commonly called the incarnation, which we look forward to in Advent, which we celebrate at Christmas.

Jesus did not merely take on our humanity,
Jesus was immersed in our humanity, and he never came up for air
– he remained immersed, baptized, incarnated in our humanity

Why?

– because God loves us – and wants each of us to see how in the midst of the brokenness and difficulties of our lives **God is indeed with us.**

Jesus became so immersed in our humanity that not only did he come to be among us, John writes that “he set up his tent among us”

– Jesus came to live with us, God came to live with us
– over the long haul.

At Kate's dad funeral I read from Romans 8:31-39

– and though it was a comforting text to Kate and Kate's family, it is much more than a funeral text,

It is a text for living in the reality of experiencing God with us

“What, then, shall we say in response to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. Who then can condemn?

No one. Christ Jesus who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword?

As it is written: ‘For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.’

No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

Jesus was baptized into our humanity to reveal God's love to us
– but more so than that
– to show us God's love, and for us to experience God's love!

Jesus' life, ministry, death, and resurrection were not just about the task of taking care of sin in the world, and in our lives,

Jesus was all about making God's love present to us
– so that we might respond to God's love and be made whole, complete.

On our way back from celebrating my parents' 60th anniversary, we stopped in Cleveland at the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame

– I noticed there was no exhibit for Christian Rock featuring the early rockers
– Larry Norman, Randy Stonehill, Chuck Girard, Love Song.

But that brings back to my mind a song from years ago – a sung song by Larry Norman – simply entitled, “I Love You” – **a song in response to God's love for us!**

We can be together for now and forever,
I love you, I love you,
Hey can you hear me, I've got to have you near me,
I love you, I love.
I was lonely till you came along,
Now you've got me singing your love-song.
I love you, I love you, I love you.....

Life is a mystery, love is a dancer,
I love you, I love you,
I had a question, you brought the answer,
I love you, I love you,
Oh, but I need you so, I could never let you go.
I was lonely once but then you came along,

I love you, I love you,
And you gave me love so I wrote down this song,
I love you, I love you,
I want to spend my life with you like the angels on high,
I love you, I love you,
You're the Morning Star, You're the Son in My Sky,
I love you, I love you.....

Songwriters: LI CALZI, GIORGIO
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Our lives are meant to be lived in response to God's love for us
– and we live lives of response by not only revealing God's love in the world, **but by showing God's love in how we live our lives in relationship with others day to day.**

We miss the point of ministry and mission **if all we see is that we are to be about the tasks of God in the world.**

The Holy Spirit comes upon us not for us to be communities of power in the world;

NO the Holy Spirit fills us, indwells us, walks with us, is with us, so that **we might be persons and communities of God's presence in the world, loving others as God loves us.**

We are persons and communities in which the presence and love of God is shared.

Do you know what makes North Suburban more than a church for so many of us?

- what we may even describe as a home
- it is because the love of God is evident here
- a love we share with one another.

In loving, we live lives in which we are at home with God, and as we are at home, we reveal what being at home with God entails – so that others may come to experience this same “at homeness with God.”

Over the years Lynne and I, and Lynne and I with girls have moved around quite a bit.

In our 32 years of marriage, we have lived in 9 different homes, in 6 different towns/cities. Until we lived where we are living now, we moved on average every 2 years.

When we moved onto the Trinity campus, I overheard our 7 year old Heather say to her 3 year old sister Hilary – “now don’t get too comfortable here – we won’t be staying here all that long.”

Because we were so nomadic in the first half of our married life, we came to realize that whenever and wherever we are together as a family, then and there we are at home – even if that home is an automobile (and for a time it was).

Wherever we are as a family we are home
– because together we share the presence of being family together.

Likewise, when we live in the midst of God’s presence, God’s embrace, God’s love, we live making visible the presence of God in the world.

So, then, wherever we are with God and God is with us = we are home

God being with us is our being home with God

God’s embrace is being home with God wherever we are.

Be open to receive the embrace and presence of God
– is to be at home with God!
(my hugging has theological roots)

So NSMC, be open, not only to be baptized in water
– identifying with Jesus baptism

But also, be open to be baptized in the Holy Spirit, whom Jesus pours out upon our lives.

Be immersed in the Spirit;
Be immersed in Jesus;
Be immersed in God’s presence, God’s love

Live in the living presence of the Spirit, being encountered, being embraced, being loved by God.

I tell you

– as we live our lives in the midst of God's presence in this way

– we will have stories to share which invites the world to see God and be immersed in the living presence of God!