

Luke 3:15-22

¹⁵As the people were filled with expectation, and all were questioning in their hearts concerning John, whether he might be the Messiah, ¹⁶John answered all of them by saying, “I baptize you with water; but one who is more powerful than I is coming; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. ¹⁷His winnowing fork is in his hand, to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his granary; but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.”

(¹⁸So, with many other exhortations, he proclaimed the good news to the people. ¹⁹But Herod the ruler, who had been rebuked by him because of Herodias, his brother’s wife, and because of all the evil things that Herod had done, ²⁰added to them all by shutting up John in prison.)

²¹Now when all the people were baptized, and when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, the heaven was opened, ²²and the Holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, “You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.”

Sermon – Sun, Jan 9, 2019 – St James

This is the Season of Epiphany – God showing us, God revealing himself to us. The Baptism of our Lord is the feast we celebrate today. In some traditions like the Russian Orthodox, the Baptism of our Lord is a very important festival.

I am excited. I have learned something.

What if Epiphany, the season of God revealing himself to us, is **all** the time, not just a few weeks between Christmas and Lent? What if God is revealing himself to us every day, all day, through others in the messiness of life? That is what I think. That is my epiphany or sudden insight.

This morning's Gospel is Luke's account of Jesus' Baptism. Jesus' baptism appears in the other Gospels, but in Luke little emphasis is placed on Jesus' actual baptism. Instead, we skip to afterwards when the heaven open, and the Holy Spirit descends upon our Lord in bodily form like a dove. Then a voice comes from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased." Luke emphasizes the newness with the coming of Jesus. The *heaven opening* suggests the inauguration, not only of Jesus' ministry as the Christ, but also of a new way of God's working in the world through the Holy Spirit. The Spirit has descended from the heavens. Our Lord Jesus is bearer of the Spirit now...truly God is near.

Jesus joins with the crowd and receives John's Baptism. By doing this he shows that he is 'in', 'in' for the long haul, 'in' despite humanity's sins which symbolically are washed away. He is 'in', knowing that these humans are flawed. He is 'in' even though it makes him vulnerable, open to being hurt and in the end he is hurt badly.

Before he leaves this earth, our Lord sends his disciples to baptize everyone, Baptism also with water, but, Baptism of the Spirit; Baptism into Christ. We are offered and receive a sacrament using water as the outward sign of the invisible grace received which is the Spirit.

Christ is baptized into us. Rather than 'mechanically' imitating him, we do it by Christ being incorporated into us. That is 'mystery' ! Imagine God working not

only in us but despite us! In a mystery beyond what we can appreciate at the time. Yes! the new way... the spirit breathing within us with sighs too deep for words.

Family/friends, church family, co-workers are a ground for life's messiness... We are immersed in it. We are immersed in our relationships and the situations they create. We realize we aren't perfect, so even though we may love each other, we are going to act weirdly, say things that sting the other without intending to, do things that confine, but we carry on...we have been baptized into Christ and he into us. He understands from experience about being human and damaged. But it is in this field of human relationships that God reveals himself.

I just read a book, a true story, a memoir, kindly loaned to me by Ann Kee. It is called 'They Left Us Everything', written by Plum Johnson. In it, I believe God is revealed through relationships. After almost twenty years of caring for elderly parents--first for their senile father, and then for their cantankerous mother--author Plum Johnson and her three younger brothers have fallen to their knees with conflicted feelings of grief and relief after their mother dies. Now they must empty and sell the beloved family home, 23 rooms bulging with history and antiques Plum thought: *How tough will that be? I know how to buy garbage bags.*

But the task turns out to be much harder and more rewarding than she ever imagined. Items from childhood trigger difficult memories of her eccentric family growing up in the 1950s and '60s. But unearthing new facts about her parents helps her **reconcile** those relationships, gaining a more accepting perspective of who they were. Many times during the process Plum had to trust her gut feeling. By doing so, she was able to reconcile her inner conflicts, and with that reconciliation came new life for her, a kind of redemption. Here it seems to me is an example of the divine working out of what it means to love crazy, eccentric people who are your family

There is a book, The theology of Revelation by Gabriel Moran, required reading at Trinity College Seminary in Toronto some years ago. It makes the point that revelation or epiphany is not just information. If God reveals himself, it means he shares himself, shares his life. He can't just give information and actually be revealing himself. That's why we have sacraments – to experience grace.

Preaching alone doesn't do it. God gives us himself. But asks the same of us and makes it possible.

Gabriel Moran writes: "God is revealed as the God of love, and...every morally good act, that is, every act formed by charity, is a revelation of God. Every word of truth and love, every hand extended in kindness, echoes the inner life of the Trinity."

Karl Rahner writes "To think that revelation is encased in doctrines taught by the apostles and not changed since that time would be to deny that God gave himself to man. Not first in books or institutions, doctrines or rituals, is God's revelation to be met, but in **people**. Man is for man the way to God. In taking hold of one man, God took hold of all men in bringing the law and prophecy to summation in a single human life, he made this man the revelation of God. Thus it is that revelation can be shone forth adequately only in people; first in the person of Jesus Christ, and second, in the person of everyone who lives in Christ.

I will share something a bit personal, my own epiphany about my week in NC. I went to visit our son, his wife and their two adorable children who are 4 and 1 ½. I had my own little place a few doors down the street from them. I flew home thinking we'd all had good times together, story hour, church, walks, the park, reading, laughing, just being together. Then I got talking with Tim, remembering the little misunderstandings, some awkward moments, little rebuffs. Talking about these memories had a snowball effect. The thought even flashed through my mind that 'Maybe it would be safer never to go back'...Then came the epiphany...despite the hiccups, the flaws...love is there...the intention of love is there and so I am 'in' just as our Lord was 'in'. For the long haul, for 'better or worse'...knowing there will be some worse mixed in with the 'better'. But also knowing , every act of charity, every hand extended in kindness is a revelation of God. It is what it is. And that, recognition that there is gold amidst the dross, there is God revealed. That is what our Lord did at his Baptism. He said 'I'm in, for better or worse.'

So we live lives where divine is revelation... is constant. We may see and understand some of this. We will probably miss a lot too. But we can be confident that in our relationships, whether family, home or work, God is always there in us and others. By living we are vulnerable, but also constantly invited to the divine.

Because we remember our Lord's Baptism today, At the end of the service, I will bless water in the font, as we do for baptisms. On your way out, please take a

small bottle of the blessed water home. There are few things more vital to our lives than our homes. 'Home' is our sacred canopy. In our homes we pray, we work, we talk, we prepare food and eat meals, we play, we rest, we sleep. What more important place to ask for God's special Presence. So please take a bottle of blessed water home and sprinkle it around your house, asking God to bless that place and protect it. Or just take the little bottle of water home and place it somewhere you will see it often...a reminder that you, like our Lord, were baptized in holy water and marked as Christ's own forever.

God we ask that you
have mercy on the house,
rid it of darkness and
fill it with every blessing.