

LECTIONARY REFLECTIONS – Epiphany 1
THE BAPTISM OF OUR LORD
By the Rt. Rev. Susan B. Haynes

Genesis 1:1-5

In the beginning was God. How comforting and grounding to understand that there never was a time when God was not. The Scripture tells us that the Earth was a formless void — a nothing. There was only darkness and nothingness. But at the same time, there was movement. Even in the darkness and the nothingness, something was happening. The breath of God was moving...sweeping powerfully over everything. Then, we are told, God created. The first thing He created was Light. God's first act of creation had the effect of dispelling the darkness and of introducing a life-generating phenomenon. That phenomenon was Light. There can be no life without light. Light helps us to keep the rhythm of time as it is divided by the darkness. Without Light, nothing can exist. After this first act of creation, God looked at it and called the light GOOD. Light is good.

So far, the year 2021 has seen national unrest and continued pandemic. Darkness. What parts of your own life seem like dark voids? We have confidence, however, that there is simultaneous movement. It is God's nature to be moving in the midst of darkness and void. It is God's nature to be bringing order out of chaos. What part of your life would you hold out to God to receive His life-generating Light?

Psalm 29

Psalm 29 is a psalm of praise to the glory and strength of the Lord, particularly as it is expressed in Nature. God's glory and voice is everywhere – upon the waters, in the thunder, through the trees, in the movements of animals, in the wilderness. No wonder naturalists encourage us to spend time in nature if we want to connect to God! Contemplative theologian Richard Rohr counsels us to develop what he terms as a “foundational sense of awe,” where we are alert to the presence of God in everything. Psalm 29 could help us get reoriented and regrounded enough to do that.

Take a walk outside and become aware of everything around you. What are your senses telling you? What do you see, hear, smell, taste and feel? How is God speaking to you in Nature? Take a moment to breathe a prayer of gratitude for His presence in this beauty.

Acts 19:1-7

Repentance means stopping and turning around – literally stopping the current trajectory of your life, re-orienting it and then moving in a different direction. Repentance is a preparation for moving in the right direction. That's the Baptism that John the Baptist was offering – a preparation for being able to move in the right direction when the Messiah comes. In this reading, Paul is moving through Ephesus where he encounters people who received the Baptism of Repentance which was offered by John, but who had not yet been baptized in the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is what enables us to move in the new, re-oriented direction. We are told in this reading that when Paul baptizes these converts with the Holy Spirit, they are empowered to speak in tongues and to prophesy. That is no small thing! Paul is modeling for us part of our own vocation: we are called to proclaim the powerful, enabling movement of the Holy Spirit.

Periodically it is good for us to stop and assess our lives to make sure that we are moving in a healthy direction. If not, we are able to stop in our tracks, turn around, and move in a different direction. The reason we are able to do that is because we have been baptized in the Holy Spirit. Do you truly understand that you are empowered for remarkable ministry through this baptism? What is it that you think the Church needs that you could provide? Yes, you CAN enable the Church's ministry powerfully. How?

Mark 1:4-11

There is something in the wilderness that people want to see and they are flocking there in great crowds. The wilderness has historically been a place of great importance for God's people. The wilderness is the place where God has always been with His people. It is the place where often He leads them and it is the place where He teaches them. His prophet, John the Baptist, is now there. John is offering a Baptism that is unique to John – one of repentance. Repentance is a turning around, a preparation for moving in a new direction. The crowds that are flocking to see John are remarkable. What is it about this man that compels people to come and then to be vulnerable enough to confess their sins? He must be a remarkable man! He definitely is different, so different that the author of the Gospel feels obliged to tell us how he is dressed and how he eats. In the wilderness, John professes and asserts his humility and the need for the Holy Spirit which is being ushered in by his own feeble attempts at preparation. Then the scene shifts to a new beginning. That beginning is the Baptism of Jesus. While the idea of a spirit descending like a dove may seem gentle to us, this is no gentle beginning. The heavens are torn open, we are told. God enters dramatically. From the moment of Genesis, God has moved dramatically through human life. In this particular part of human life, God identifies his Son – the Light of the world – and deems Him good, someone with whom He is well pleased. In the beginning God created Light and called it good. Here, He blesses His Son, the light of the world and calls Him good also. ***How is God moving in your life? How is He dramatically inserting Himself into your world? How is He shining His good light into your darkness? Have you sensed yourself in a wilderness lately? How is God leading you and what is He trying to teach you? God is well pleased with you. Even if you cannot hear His voice proclaiming that, His spirit is upon you and that generates pleasure for Him. Can you connect with your own goodness even as today you renew your own baptismal promises?***

COLLECT:

Father in heaven, who at the baptism of Jesus in the River Jordan proclaimed him your beloved Son and anointed him with the Holy Spirit: Grant that all who are baptized into his Name may keep the covenant they have made, and boldly confess him as Lord and Savior; who with you and the Holy Spirit lives and reigns, one God, in glory everlasting. Amen.