

The Baptism of Jesus Yr B 2017 Based on Mark 1: 1-11 with Genesis 1: 1-5, Psalm 29, Acts 19: 1-7

I truly appreciate how the scriptures for today come together this week, building upon each other, complementing each other, enhancing the message of God's creation, God's presence and God's love in that presence.

So, we begin at the very beginning: Genesis 1: 1. God created. From the formless earth where only emptiness and darkness covered the deep waters, from this chaos, God created. And "A wind from God swept over the face of the waters." (*NRSV v 2*).

Now, interestingly, the word for wind, breath and Spirit in ancient Hebrew, is the same word - '*ruach*'. So it's not always clear when the word '*ruach*' is used which English word is the best translation. Other translations of the bible translate this verse as "And the Spirit of God was hovering over the surface of the waters." (*NLT*) Either way, what is clear is that God is creator. It's that simple and that amazing. The Spirit of God is present at the beginnings of creation, sweeping like the wind, hovering across the dark and chaotic waters of the formless Earth.

"Then God said 'Let there be light' and there was light." (*vs 3*) God sees that it is good. Yes, it is very good -- that which creates light from darkness **really is** good. And it is God who does that! God brings light to the deep, to the chaotic waters and formless void, from light comes life. And creation continues: sky and land, vegetation and animals of every kind, culminating with God's creation of humanity, people created in God's own image, created to be stewards, to take care of God's creation. And God saw that it was very good indeed.

Then our Psalm for today is a song of praise for the glory, the splendor, the strength and might of this Creator God, whose incredible voice can be heard all across the land and in a myriad of ways and places. This is the Lord, the psalmist tells us, who is ultimate power over everything, to make or to break God's own creation, always and forever, the supreme King. Yet --- this is also a God who gives strength to God's people and blessings of peace. Yes, we are blessed to have such a God!

And Mark's gospel, the first of the four gospels to be written, begins at the beginning too, the beginning of Jesus ministry. Mark 1, verse 1: "The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God." Did you know that the word 'gospel' is actually a Greek word meaning 'good news'?

So, Mark gets right down to the point: No special birth narrative, no angels, shepherds or wise men announcing the birth of God's son come to earth. For Mark, it seems that was John the baptizer's role, to 'prepare the way of the Lord.' Now, John had disciples of his own, he had followers, something like a revival movement, bringing people back to their faith. John was telling them to repent of their sins—to turn away from a life lived contrary to God's ways and re-dedicate their lives to living according to God's laws. And this dedication, this cleansing away of the old life and beginning of a new was symbolized in the process of baptism, being dunked in the Jordan River, washing away the old and starting life anew, fresh and clean. This baptism was a ritual of re-covenanting, promising yourself and God that you wanted to start again. A spiritual and religious do-over you could say!

Now, John knew of his special calling as the announcer to the coming of the Messiah. John was awaiting the news of this powerful one's coming. And while John could show of God's grace through the ritual cleansing of the waters of baptism, this special one who was to come would have the power to baptize with the Holy Spirit, the creating Spirit of God, the spirit that creates new life in Christ.

This is just what Paul is referring in our reading today from the Book of Acts. Paul has found some disciples in Ephesus and asks them:

² Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?" (Paul) asked (these disciples). "No," they replied, "we haven't even heard that there is a Holy Spirit."³ "Then what baptism did you experience?" he asked. And they replied, "The baptism of John."⁴ Paul said, "John's baptism called for repentance from sin. But John himself told the people to believe in the one who would come later, meaning Jesus."⁵ As soon as they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.⁶ Then when Paul laid his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them
(Acts 19 2-6a, NLT)

Just like when Jesus came to John to be baptized into this renewal movement¹ that John had begun. As Jesus came out of the water, the Spirit tore apart the heavens, sweeping down and descending on Jesus. The Spirit of God, which swept over the darkness of the first creation, now splits apart the skies of God's creation, only to descend upon Jesus, the Christ, the Son of God, the one who came to bring new light to the world. And for those with ears to hear, heard God say, that this man Jesus was God's beloved Son. And this too is very good.

Baptism is a means by which the grace of God, the Spirit of God comes to us. Our BAS puts it this way: "Baptism is the sign of new life in Christ. Baptism unites Christ with his people."² Baptism is our initiation into the promises of a life in Christ. "... to be a Christian is to be part of a new creation which rises from the dark water of Christ's death into the dawn of his risen life."³ There is great symbolism in the use of the water; it is with water that we are made clean, a cleansing from sin, the symbolism of a rebirth, of being born again *in Christ*. We are baptized into Christ's death, only to be born into new life in Christ. "Baptism is the sacramental beginning of the Christian life in the Christian community for both children and adults."⁴

That's why Anglicans baptize infants and young children; they are baptized as full members of the community, baptized into the body of Christ. This is why we no longer do 'private' baptisms. The members of the full church community are present at a baptism, are asked to support those who are being baptized. And it is also why children baptized as infants are offered Holy Communion as soon as they are physically able to receive it. We are baptized in the Anglican tradition into Christ's community, into the worldwide community of Christian believers, baptized in the name of the triune, the threefold God -- Father, Son and Holy Spirit, which is why Anglicans believe that re-baptism is really unnecessary.

With each baptism, we ask God's blessing on the water we use, the water being symbolic of the waters of creation and the waters of the Jordan at Christ's baptism. And each January when we read the story of Jesus' baptism it reminds that we can begin again, that we can repent and we are forgiven; and provides us the opportunity to renew our baptismal vows and recommit ourselves to a life following in the footsteps of Jesus.

And what a great day to do this--on this first Sunday of a new year, on the first Sunday as a member of the Regional Ministry of Hope, we remind ourselves that in Christ, all is made new. The wonderful creative, forgiving, life giving, resurrecting power of God in Christ makes all things new! And with the power of God's Holy Spirit, we really can do more than we can ever ask or imagine. Amen.

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¹ The New Oxford Annotated Bible, footnote to Mark 1: 9-11

² BAS p. 146.

³ BAS p. 146

⁴ Baycroft, John. The Anglican Way (ABC Publishing:Toronto ON, 1980) 22