

Isaiah 49:1-7
Psalm 40:1-12
1 Corinthians 1:1-19
John 1:29-42

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, Amen.

I remember that when we started Advent a few weeks ago, I mentioned the fact that we were beginning a new Church year, and starting Year A in the lectionary. Year A has Matthew as the gospel in nearly all cases, but you'll notice that today we have a reading from the gospel according to John. Today we have John's description of Jesus's baptism, not Matthew's. Doing this—switching the gospel writer—is a way of reinforcing Jesus's divinity. In John's Gospel, John the Baptist makes it clear, as he says, that "I myself have seen and have testified that this is the Son of God." But many have wondered, since Jesus is the Son of God, and is both divine and human, why did he have to be baptized at all? He was sinless, and so didn't need John's baptism for the forgiveness of his sins. All four gospels tell this story. What was the point of baptizing Jesus?

For one thing, biblical scholars all agree that this event actually took place. The fact that all four gospels tell the same story supports the idea that Jesus really was baptized by his cousin John. And the fact that the story appears on all four gospels also means that it was a very significant story for Jesus's early followers.

But why was Jesus baptized?

We might think that he didn't need baptism, but that's because we know who he is, and we know his story. But what if Jesus didn't know his sinless state at this point? What if he didn't really know what he was called to do until now? What if the baptismal event was Jesus's call to ministry? This experience: the washing in the Jordan River, the spirit descending on him like a dove, the voice identifying him as the Son of God might all have been a revelation to him in a very real sense. We don't really have many details of Jesus's life before this. We hear about his birth, and Luke tells about Jesus in the temple at age 12, which we have a lovely stained-glass window of behind the altar. But we don't hear very much about the first 30 years of Jesus's life.

We don't really know much at all about Jesus until the baptismal event. But we do know that he came down to the Jordan River that day to see and hear his cousin John the Baptist. Something about John's proclamation, resonated with him, and Jesus decided that he wanted to be part of John's movement, so he went down into the water with everybody else to be baptized. But when he came up out of the water, something unexpected happened. Jesus had a transcendent experience. He saw into heaven, he looked up and saw the Spirit of God descending upon him, and he heard God's voice saying to him, "You are my Son, my beloved; in you, I am well pleased."

Suddenly Jesus knew who he was. He might have suspected that he was different, maybe even special. Certainly, if Mary and Joseph had told him about his birth, the angels, and shepherds, he might have had some idea. But as a human being, he wouldn't have known that he was also divine unless he had experienced something that let him know that. Being human means that we only know what we have experienced, or been taught. What happened with John in the Jordan River would have been the event that defined Jesus. From this point on, Jesus begins to live into the reality of who he is. He begins to realize his call, his task, and he begins to call his disciples.

For us, Jesus's baptismal story can function as a kind of mirror. We are also beloved of God. Each of us is a loved child of the creator. WE are not THE Son of God, but we are loved, and we are *called*. We are called to do many things, things that we might never have suspected. The Bible is filled with stories of people who are called—and some of them answer the call, and others don't. But each of us is called to a life in Christ and to particular things.

Last night I saw some people answering that call as our parish served at the Winchester Area Temporary Thermal Shelter, or WATTS. And actually we still have some parishioners there this morning, serving breakfast to our homeless neighbors. The Ruritan building at the fairgrounds was turned into a temporary dormitory of sorts, with 35 cots, a television area, and a dining area. WATTS provides winter shelter and food to people who are struggling with homelessness.

Before our guests arrived for dinner, we had an orientation speech by an employee of WATTS. He helped us to understand that we would probably recognize some of our guests, because they were almost all residents of Winchester, Frederick, or Clarke County. We would have gone to school with them, or taught them, or worked with them. These *were* our neighbors. He said that their privacy and identity were strictly guarded by law, so we were to take no pictures of the guests, and not to talk about individuals by name. He said that, in the past, some of the guests had been fired from their jobs when their employers discovered that they were homeless. Yes, there are people who work, and who are also homeless, just like there are people who work who also need the help of our food pantry.

But last night our neighbors were warm, and safe, and well-fed because so MANY people gave of their time, and answered God's call to them to make that happen. Our parishioners recruited the needed help, coordinated deliveries of food, cooked, helped set up, served food, and then cleaned up. I can't even count how many of our Christ Church members answered the call to serve in this ministry. When I was getting ready to leave last night, one of our members looked at me expectantly and said, "okay, what's next? What's our next project?"

I ask that of you all today. What's next? Not just for the parish, but for you? What is God calling you to do next?
Amen.