

We have a collision of two different worlds in today's Gospel. We have the world of John the Baptist and we have the reality of Jesus. John the Baptist yearned for the Messiah, but the Messiah John the Baptist wanted was very different from the Messiah he baptizes today. John the Baptist believed in and worshipped a different kind of God than do we, or the one we are supposed to be worshipping. John the Baptist's God was a kind of kick-butt, callous even. But, still, a God that if pushed hard enough, would grudgingly forgive, provided you promised to never, never, never do that thing again. This is a pretty tough God John the Baptist was preaching.....

What John the Baptist got was a very a different Messiah. No wonder those folks who were constantly questioning Jesus could not recognize him: they were waiting for John the Baptist's version of the Messiah, a warrior king, not this guy who brings good news to the poor, the outcast the disenfranchised. This Messiah who preaches and acts out a love that not only embodies who he is, but encompasses all whom he meets.

Two worlds colliding as Jesus comes up out of the water and has a private moment with God, a private authentication of who Jesus is, at least private in the version provided for us today by the Gospel writer we call Mark....Baptism is the start of Jesus' public ministry, his public life.

Baptism is for us, a memory-piece of Jesus. All our sacraments are that: memory-pieces. And these sacramental acts, these memory-pieces of the life of Jesus, are meant, partially, to keep the memory of Jesus alive, to keep a piece of Jesus with us: to be an intimate, a personal connection between Jesus and us. Much like Jesus' intimate and personal interaction with God today as he comes out of that water

The theologian, Mark Dyer believes that Jesus' understanding of himself, of who he was and who he was to become, was developmental in nature. This means that God informed Jesus in a piecemeal fashion with what he was to do and who he was to become....And that begins today. Jesus comes up out of the waters of baptism, the skies part, a voice acknowledges him, and the Holy Spirit descends upon him. God is revealing to Jesus who Jesus is today. Jesus comes up out of the water and sees things completely differently and sets out to try to discern who and what he is now, and who and what he is to become.

That is what happens to us when we are baptized. That is what happens to us when repeat the Baptismal Covenant, our vows, and this is what happens when we see someone baptized. We are imitating Jesus when we are engaged in this memory-piece of Jesus' life: we have an intimate encounter with God, both as individuals and corporately. And we can see the world differently, and are called to act differently in the world because of this baptism. Imitating Jesus in baptism is calling us to imitate Jesus in life: to live as he did, focusing on the poor, the sick, the oppressed, the blind, the lame. And not just the physically poor, sick, blind and lame. But also to the spiritually poor, the spiritually sick, the spiritually blind. We are called to live differently than we were before baptism, and we are reminded of that call when we participate in a baptism and when we repeat our baptismal vows..... Jesus had a personal epiphany moment when he came out of the waters of baptism: an AHA moment when he saw the same world.....anew. His developmental understanding of himself took a great leap forward.

Whether you buy this developmental understanding of Jesus' understanding of himself, or not, we cannot argue that all of us are developmental in our understanding of the world around us, of our relationship with God and with ourselves. So much of that developmental understanding comes from choices we are given in life, choices we make in life. God gives us choices, and as baptized people of Christ we are constantly called upon to act, to face decision points, day in and day out: some are major, most are minor. But God's grace is in all of these turning points, these AHA moments that can so profoundly change our world and set a *new reality* right in front of us..... Provided we are willing to see those opportunities and are willing to grow and change with that new developmental understanding of ourselves and of God's workings in the world. These gifts of AHA moments are times where we can try new things, not do things because that is the way we always have done them.

And these Epiphany-moments, these AHA moments are when we can directly see the difference between the God of John the Baptist and the God that is our Jesus. There are more followers, today, I think, of this God of John the Baptist than of our Jesus, because so many people cannot believe that they are worthy of this *smothering love* emanating from Jesus. This God that is Jesus loves us beyond any concept we can imagine, and then some. This God that is Jesus wants to be in relationship with each and every one of us, no matter what we think we may have done to not deserve that love.

We believe and profess a God that is not John the Baptist's. We are believers in the God revealed to us in Jesus Christ, acknowledged in our Scripture today, who loves us beyond our wildest imaginings, and asks us to radically love all those with whom we come in contact. We are called by our baptismal vows, by our memory-piece of Jesus' life, to bring this radical and wild and uncompromising love to the thousands of people who pass by our church everyday, and who have no idea what awaits them, right here....right here..... We are called to assist all we meet in their own developmental understanding of this radical love in their lives.

The writer Madeleine L'Engle wrote a short story called "Mary: after the baptism," which beautifully ties all these concepts together. L'Engle says in part:

Yes, of course, on many days I doubted. My faith grew out of doubt...And I was waiting, remembering in my heart the very things that caused my doubt: the angel's first appearing to me and then to Joseph; shepherds, kings, the flight to Egypt. Remembering was fearing: doubt helped. I had to face it all as true the day John baptized him....for then he began to know too.

How we get those thousands who pass by each day to see and become part of this radical love, is what we are called upon to embody and act out: minute by minute, hour by hour, day by day, non-stop. Not for us really, but for them....But not specifically for them, but for the Kingdom we are called to create, live in and embody.....We need to get going.

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