

## **“Drenched”**

(Luke 3:15-22)

I was drenched! I am talking hair matted to my forehead; water dripping from my nose; and the sleeve of my shirt stuck to my arm kind of drenched. This was no baptismal moment this was a home improvement call Bob Villa emergency. So, as I am standing there exhausted, shoulders slumped, and fumes of frustration forming above my head like an ominous cloud, I catch myself thinking, ‘Go ahead, Wes, make something meaningful out of this.’

I firmly believe that every moment holds the possibility and potential of encountering God and I try my best to approach life fully aware that God’s presence permeates our life. But the reality is those beliefs do not always translate into heavens parting, angelic choirs singing, harps playing, saturated in the sacred moments punctuating every single second. There are moments that are simply ordinary, moments that refuse to be twisted or bent to reveal a new insight into the holy. Even when you intentionally try to live the incarnation and open your senses to the sacred; there will still be the mundane or frustrating or moments that most of us think don’t belong inside the church. Pause for a moment and think back over the past week, the fluttering thoughts when someone cuts you off in traffic or barges in line at the store or that co-worker who drones on and on with illusions of grandeur about all he does when you know he’s playing solitaire. Those moments that we wonder how in the world can this experience bring me any closer to God? And friends it’s not that God feels particularly distant or close, rather it is just a moment; ordinary and even mundane.

What’s surprising in our gospel reading is that ordinariness is what best describes Jesus’ baptism. Luke is so nonchalant, casual about this moment we today call a sacrament, a visible, tangible experience of God’s grace, but not so much according to Luke. For someone who loves to spin a good story together, Luke is surprisingly brief concerning the actual baptism of Jesus. “Now when all the people were baptized,” Luke writes, “and when Jesus also had been baptized.” It’s almost like an after thought, like saying, “oh yeah, before I forget, Jesus was baptized.” The image Luke evokes for me is one of Jesus standing in line, waiting to wade into the water, there is no express lane for Jesus. Rather he is one among many, a face in the crowd that day, waiting on the shoreline for his turn. There is no John the baptizer here, he has already been put in prison. There is no mention of what body of water drenched Jesus hair or dripped from his nose. There is no dove descending or booming voice claiming Jesus, at least not in that initial gasping for air moment when Jesus’ face broke through the surface of the water. It is an ordinary moment.

Sometimes even moments we think will be saturated with the sacred can leave us wanting, possibly disappointed or discouraged that we did not encounter God the way we expected or at all. You sign up for a church workshop and go away frustrated by what you heard. You go to a worship service and it just doesn’t fit or feel right and your mind wanders aimlessly. Not every moment is a mountain top experience, not every time you step inside the church can we offer some money back guarantee that you’ll encounter the holy, or my name isn’t Wes Bixby kind of commercialization. We can’t control when we will stumble into the spirit. We can only try our best to be awake, aware, alert that in the ebb and flow of life there will be moments of closeness and distance and ordinariness in our relationship with God.

So, if that's the case, last Sunday night after Gina and I had spent all afternoon trying to install a new kitchen sink, only to have our bathroom toilet spring a leak that drenched me (hair, face, nose, shirt) along with the walls and the floor; maybe there are moments as I try to live the incarnation and attempt to be open to God's presence that will still leave me scratching my wet head wondering if there is a deeper meaning to being baptized by my toilet or perhaps I am just better off letting go and moving on.

As the water that dripped off the tips of Jesus hair and beard slowly stopped, as his skin cooled to the touch from the water evaporating away and his robe started to have that crispness that comes from having been air dried; Jesus moves into a time of prayer. And it is then, at that moment, Luke lets loose the dove, the heavens open, and the voice of God descends in a way we usually associate with the seconds immediately following Jesus face bursting through the water's surface. It is only later on, when Jesus is in prayerful solitude that he encounters God in an amazing way. It is through prayer that Jesus' life is drenched. It is through prayer that Jesus is saturated with the Spirit. It is through prayer that Jesus' soul is stirred and his ministry is started.

Maybe for us it is somewhere between the mundane moments and prayerful pauses that we can encounter God. Maybe it's not about either or, one way or the other; but rather more accurately the life of faith is both and. Sometimes God stirs in the grocery line as you connect with another person and sometimes you just stare at the cover of *People* magazine. Sometimes you are able to forgive someone in such a way that it feels like a burden is lifted off your shoulders and sometimes the other person just smirks at your attempt to reconcile. Sometimes worship stays with you all week long and sometimes by Monday afternoon it can feel like we are already running on empty. Our faith journey is more like a Lewis and Clark expedition; more akin to *Star Trek* journeying to the unknown, mysterious space frontiers than it is simply following some already known, carefully plotted, and well trampled path. The mundane can become holy and what are supposed to be holy moments can feel downright ordinary.

What Luke leaves us with is prayer. The last words invite us into prayerful, prayer-filled, intentionality. Prayer, listening for and talking with God, is what can connect the mundane to the sacred shedding new light on both. While we might be interested in a class or sermon series on prayer, most of us don't want to talk too openly about our own prayer life. Barbara Brown Taylor writes, "I would rather show someone my checkbook stubs than talk about my prayer life. I would rather confess that I am a rotten godmother, that I struggle with my weight, that I fear I am overly fond of gin martinis than confess that I am a prayer-weakling. To say I love God but I do not pray much is like saying I love life but I do not breathe much."<sup>1</sup>

Prayer grounds us in a constant conversation with the One who our soul longs to connect with in meaningful, life giving ways. The truth is also that prayer can take **so many forms**, shifting suddenly almost erratically from finding God through reading scripture, devotionals, sitting in silence, walking, listening to music, playing with children, serving the homeless, and the list could go on and on. There is no one form of prayer that is universal, and most likely there is no one form of prayer that will sustain you throughout your life time or sometimes even throughout one single month. Which is why most of us shy away from

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<sup>1</sup> Barbara Brown Taylor, *An Altar in the World*, pg. 176

talking about prayer; we feel like a nomad wandering from one form to another and sometimes going through extended dry spells where we rarely visit the wellspring of prayer.

Our baptism immerses us in a relationship with the One who claims us as beloved making our baptism not just one moment really, but rather a series of encounters with the sacred that drench our lives. So, where do you sense God's presence most abundantly right now? If you have not discovered a way of connecting with God in meaningful, infectious smile inducing ways, maybe this will be the year our church does something about that. Maybe this year, we as a church will delve into prayer. But not with a short academic, lecture by me or anyone else about prayer; but actually practice prayer along side each other. To be sure, I know such a suggestion might cause some restless shifting in the pews leading you to glance at your bulletin or watch to see when this sermon might be wrapping up. So, I am going to let that invitation linger in the air and in your hearts this morning. Perhaps this week you'll have a thought about our church becoming a more prayerful community and please call or email me with that thought. Perhaps now or several weeks from now you'll have a question about prayer and stop by the office to chat. In the meantime, may you think about places you've encountered God and times when you've felt closest to God. May you ponder what makes your soul leap within you and warms your heart. But most of all may you find ways to be drenched by both the sacred and ordinary this day and throughout the week to come.

Thanks be to God and let the people of God say, "Amen!"