

Grace & Peace to you, Dear Friends,

The theme for today is - "Defining Moments". When I selected that title for the sermon, I had no idea we would see such a "defining moment" to the south of us in the USA. Yesterday, I was glued to the T. V. praying that no one would get hurt or killed. I know now that there were 5 deaths associated with the mob insurrection on Capital Hill in Washington, D.C. They have taken down President Trump's Titter & Facebook accounts until further notice. There is such anger & fear. Only a few days left before Joe Biden becomes the new President. I pray there will be no more violent incidents before the inauguration.

Can you think of a defining moment in your life?—something that changed your life. --a marriage, a birth, a death??

PAUSE & REFLECT

I'm sure that there have been several in your lifetime.

Today we are talking specifically about **Baptisms**—I don't remember my baptism—but I do remember when I joined the church—only 12 years old. I remember I was particularly anxious about kneeling—whether I'd trip—the 3 steps we had to go up. It was Park St UC in Chatham—a huge church. I think they could seat 2000. The minister placed his hands on me. I felt a little unworthy and hoped God thought I was good enough to be received. Unfortunately there was no bulletin kept—I have no words—no remembrance of the words spoken. What I do remember is the hymn we sang: "I have decided to follow Jesus. I have decided to follow Jesus. No turning back, no turning back."

In my life it was **a defining moment**. I didn't know how I would serve—what was ahead for me--but I knew I would be forever a follower—a lover of Jesus, the Christ.

In our scriptures today we read from **Mark**. We are in what is called year B. It is a 3 year cycle ABC . Most of the main gospel readings will be from the gospel of Mark.

Mark's gospel is characterized by urgency – events happen at a rapid pace. There is no birth story—no angels, shepherds, (as is the case in the gospel of Luke) and no wise men (as is the case in the gospel of Matthew). In both Mt and Lk, Jesus' lineage is recounted in great detail—not so in Mark. We go right to his baptism & ministry. In these opening verses, John the Baptizer bursts on the scene with a shocking message: Israel must repent and return to God's ways.

John the Baptizer is a dramatic figure, dressed like the prophet Elijah (2 Kings 1:8), whose return was said to herald the coming of God's Messiah. John preaches by the Jordan River, evoking images of Moses, the exodus from Egypt, and the entry of God's people into the land of promise. People are intrigued by John's message, and crowds flock to listen. This is enough to make the civil and religious authorities anxious. They wonder: who is John, and what does this message of repentance mean?

John proclaims that a more powerful one is coming. His ministry prepares a receptive audience for Jesus. The gospel writer of Mark tries to show followers of John and Jesus that Jesus is the one to follow – the one sent from God to reveal God's ways. John's baptism cleanses from sin, but baptism

with **the Holy Spirit transforms individuals and society**. God will be present through the Spirit, bringing new life in God's reign—God's kingdom to come on earth..

Each of the gospels includes the story of Jesus' baptism, **the defining moment** that marks the beginning of Jesus' public ministry. Jesus comes to the Jordan to participate in John's baptism, going down into the water and coming up again. Jesus shares our humanity and participates in the experience of the people. In Mark's telling, only Jesus sees the heavens open and the Spirit descend like a dove. Only Jesus hears the voice from heaven: "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased." Perhaps this is why the disciples, throughout Mark's gospel, are slow to understand who Jesus is.

Today is our Covenant renewal Sunday, an invitation to enter again into the mystery and wonder of Baptism and our covenant with God. Baptism is important to our identity as Christians, as it is **the defining moment** in which we enter into the Christian family. This is why in our tradition children are baptized. It always amazes me the number of families who want baptism for their children. Some who never seem so interested in church—or the faith community, do want their children baptized. Baptism remains important—it establishes this sacred relationship with God for their children. We want our children to be part of the Christian family. At baptism we are **claimed, called and commissioned (sent out)** Claimed as a beloved child of God, called –to be followers of Christ and commissioned–to **live God's love in the world.** *

In our tradition we also have confirmation—about grade 8 or 9—or older. There is adult confirmation too. It is a time to reflect on your relationship with God. –to strengthen the ties. You hear God say: "You are my beloved child."

This covenant we have with God helps us everyday in our transformation—right relationship with ourselves, with God and with others. **READ **** the 3 questions in the bulletin.**

A defining moment is not always formal eg. baptism. This week I stepped outside early in the morning—it was a "fairy land"--magical. The new-fallen snow was on all the trees, branches, fences—everything was covered in a blanket of snow. In my heart, I sang: "Come and find the quiet centre, find the room for HOPE to enter, clear the chaos and the clutter, that we might see all the things that really matter, **be at peace, and simple be.**" (VU 374)

Prayer: Holy One, in you, we live and move and have our being. Your Son, Jesus speaks to us and we remember our own baptism and hear you say to us, " My beloved, with you, I am well-pleased". May we always be worthy of the trust you have placed in us, your devoted followers.

To you, be all the glory, now & forever. AMEN!

See the bulletin for those we hold in prayer this week. We also remember

Robert "Bob" D. Elliott (Nov. 11, 1936-Jan. 6, 2020)--a man dearly loved by his friends and family.

For the Merry Heart:

1. Principal: This is the 4th time you've been in my office this week.
What do you have to say for yourself?
Sam: I'm so glad today is Friday!
2. What do you call the best butter on the farm?---- A goat!
3. What did the Dalmatian say after he finished eating That hit the spots.

Have a good week. Stay safe!

Be at Peace,

Annalee

