John Sampson

“The Anointed”

Text: Luke 3:15 – 17, 21 - 22

Preached at KVCC

January 13, 2019

Will you pray with me?

God, may the words of my mouth, and the meditations of all of our hearts, be acceptable to you, our rock, and our redeemer.

Amen.

Epiphany.

Last week we celebrated the day in the life of the church known as Epiphany. It’s the day when we tell the story of the magi, those sacred magicians, who followed a star, and came West to meet a baby born a king. To meet Jesus.

And I shared with you my understanding that Jesus is celebrated as a king by these travelers, because the magi recognize in Jesus a profound intersection of the Divine and the human.

What’s more, I believe that our tradition tells us that this image of God living in Jesus is not unique to just one person, but rather it’s a revelation of the image of God living in each of us.

In you, and in me.

Epiphany. For some in the church Epiphany is one day, a single moment in the story of God’s relationship to her children. For others, it is an entire season that stretches from the end of Christmas to the beginning of Lent.

And that’s the way I like to think of Epiphany, because it means we’re in for a whole series of revelations, a whole season where week after week another spiritually profound insight is wrapped as a gift and given to us by our spiritual ancestors.

And this week the gift that we’re given is the story of John and the baptism of Jesus. Now it’s a story we heard not too long ago, during Advent. And when we heard the story then we shared a ritual of washing right here in the middle of our sanctuary. It was a ritual to open our hearts and prepare ourselves for the birth of the Christ child in our midst.

But now that child has been born, and we hear this story again. We meet John on the banks of the Jordan dunking people under the water and inviting us all to works of repentance. We meet Jesus, now no longer a child, coming to the Jordan and participating in this ritual of washing just like all of the others around him.

And just like the story of Epiphany this story about Jesus being baptized, being dunked in the water of the Jordan, is all about us.

Do you remember your baptism?

For many of us the answer is no. And that’s because many of us were baptized when we were babies. For many of us the baptisms that we remember are the baptism of others. Maybe we attended a baptism as a parent, or a godparent, or even in a church like this one where we witness the baptism of another congregant’s child.

But today our story of Jesus asks us to join him in the waters of the Jordan and remember what would have happened at our baptism. Yes, there was water, yes we were dunked. But there were also promises made. And I want to share again with you what the baptismal promises we make in this congregation are. And this time I want to direct them to each one of you. I want you to experience for yourselves what this moment means as a way of embracing the image of God living in each of us, and as a moment when we commit to it in our lives.

So I will say out loud some of the statements and the promises we make during baptism here in this church, and I invite you to hold them in your hearts, and assent to them in your own way, as you feel comfortable doing so.

[Ring Bell]

So I ask you,

do you wish to be baptized into the faith and family of Jesus Christ?

If so, please answer within your heart “I do.”

Will you follow

in the ways of Jesus by resisting oppression,

showing love and justice,

and witnessing to the work of God in the world

as best you are able?

If so, please answer within your heart “I will, with the help of God.”

Will you renounce the powers of evil in order to receive the freedom of new life?

If so, please answer within your heart “I will, with the help of God.”

Baptism involves promises – those we make with God, but also those we make to each other. No one can follow Jesus alone, it takes a community to nurture and challenge us in the faith. And so I ask you here, family, friends and congregation, who witness and celebrate this sacrament, do you promise your love, care and support to each other as we all live and grow in Christ?

If so, please say within your hearts “We promise our love, care and support.”

[Ring Bell]

The moment of Jesus’ baptism in the waters of the Jordan begins his ministry of healing and of justice. It is a ministry that puts love, which God extends to all of her children, in the center of a new way of life. Jesus’ example teaches us that to be recognized a child of God is not enough. Our epiphany of being made in God’s image needs to be actualized in a commitment to a life of service, and to works of compassion.

That is what our baptismal promises are all about. They are about assenting to a way of life that resists oppression and evil, and which upholds the humanity of all people. And they are about accepting the sovereignty of these values within our hearts, and making them of ultimate worth in our lives.

And so this moment of baptism, this moment we encounter again this morning, complexifies what it means to be a child of god. Yes, we are all born in the image of God. But our tradition tells us that’s not enough. Like Jesus we can’t stay babies all of our lives; we can’t stay stuck in the manger forever. We have to grow and begin living into the implications of our birth. We have to embrace the unique ways that God invites us to do works of love, and acts of justice in this world.

That’s what it means for us to be the anointed and beloved children of God, with whom she is well pleased.

Amen.