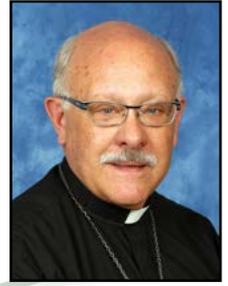




Hear the Word

from Pastor James N. McEachran



Gather... Encourage... Equip... Send...

Baptism of Our Lord

January 8, 2017

All In!

Matthew 3:13-17

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ!

Friday marked The Epiphany of Our Lord. All too quickly we have moved from manger, to Temple, to the Jordan. The pace of our last weeks has found us recalling that the lives of Mary and Joseph changed rapidly, but not without the consistent presence of the angel messengers to call them to remember God's plan and promise that their lives would be blessed to be a blessing.

While today we shift to Matthew's Gospel for the rest of this liturgical year, I invite you to remember what we have learned from Luke: Jesus' parents were faith-filled observant Jews who kept the Law of the Lord---they taught Jesus Torah, the narrative of God's mighty acts, brought Him to Temple for circumcision and at Mary's purification named him "Jesus."

At worship last week, on New Years' Day, we heard the narrative of the 12-year-old Jesus, in Jerusalem, for Passover, and getting lost for 3 days. When found, teaching in the Temple and saying, He was about His "Father's business." Or, as one translator has it "being about the things in my Father's household." Then, they went home to Nazareth and Jesus grew up like any young man. With family and friends, Cousin John may have come round, and Luke recorded that Jesus "grew in wisdom," while Mary continued to ponder all of these things in her heart. As if to say, the concerns and prayer of a mother never end.

Today, some 18 years after Jesus was found at the Temple, He came from Galilee to be baptized by John, his cousin, at the Jordan River. What we know to have been a baptism for the repentance of sin, for Matthew is but one more step in Jesus being observant to the will of God, "to fulfill all righteousness." Consistent in showing Jesus as obedient to God.

What does it all mean that Jesus came forward, with the crowds, to the water of blessing. Not a singular rite, but one of many watering rites within the Jewish tradition, but this was different and we know from the Gospel narratives that the crowds responded in ways and numbers unheard of to that day at the Jordan.

Brief exchange: John tried to stop him and made his near faith confession, "I need to be baptized by you." Jesus persists, "Let it be now, this is right, to make full all righteousness." Jesus identifies with the Sin, the sins, in all of humanity and seeks to be seen in solidarity as He received the Holy Spirit,

“descending like a dove, alighting on him. And a voice from the heavens, ‘My Son, the Beloved, I am well pleased.’” As if to set Him on the servant way. That mercy sent might enfold the world, each one of us, with the forgiveness of sin and the walk of becoming discipleFIT in every way, every day, as long as God gives us life together.

It is a story told once by a friend of mine...from his serving in lower Manhattan at a church shelter. Mario, had lived there out of homelessness. He was celebrating his birthday at the evening meal. As he celebrated, those who ate with him said that they could not believe he was 60. In a moment, he reached into his coat pocket and delivered his birth certificate which confirmed that he was 60.

He then asked if they wanted to see his baptismal certificate which indicated that he had been baptized on the Lower Eastside. Imagine him carry that along with him and he said, “I hold dual citizenship. The United State of America and the Kingdom of God!”

The image is compelling as we continue our Epiphany walk as those who have been blessed with a Promise Graciously Given which calls us to be those who now respond as a Promise (is) Faithfully Received.

Last Lord’s Day, I asked what I believe are two of the most important questions we can ask in this new year of grace and as we make our New Year’s “Re-revolutions,” as we “Re-member” whose we are---The first “How are you about growth in discipleship?” Where is your part, your place of growth and service in our congregation? Where are you being called anew to be about the Father’s business? The second, “How do you share Jesus with others?” Who do you invite into the life and ministry of our faith community?

It is often the case that an invite is the way into the pathway of discipleship. I have seen that often in the past years, especially as neighbors invite neighbors into program for youth and family! Engaging families in our partnership of growing in Christ through the generations.

In this Time of Epiphany, I invite you into a time of Reflection and renewed commitment. To see anew that the ministries of this place are not a work of our own doing, but the work of sheer grace in the power of the Holy Spirit.

15 days ago we came to worship at the Manger. On this day, the tree is our Epiphany Light Post to gather us towards the Light of Christ, at the Font of Remembrance, to feast at the Table as a people who are about the work of reconciliation with God and with one another. And that, through the One, who came to the Jordan that He might walk the Way of Sorrows to a Cross for you and for me.

In my days of ordained ministry, the church has been referenced in many ways. I recall when the church was called “a hospital for sin sick souls” (Those were my Baptist days!) where the Great Physician treated us with the ‘Gos-PILL’ and the tones of “There is a Balm in Gilead.”

Then, there were times when the church was considered as a gas station that spiritual tanks might be topped off and the batteries of the Spirit recharged for a new week.

I have learned to prefer to think of the church as the workshop of the Holy Spirit. Where God’s people gather together to live the mission, work the plan, renew the community spirit as we seek to be fit to serve in body, mind, and spirit. Where are you at in that adventure in this new year of grace, with Jesus and with one another?

Beloved, there is no deficit in matters of grace. For those who are “ALL IN with the Lord,” love and generosity breed a community of the redeemed that leads to the utter truth that the work we do is because we have been with Jesus and are a people reconciled to serve until He comes again.

Jesus was launched at the Jordan. Clear in the path that God the Father has set before this one, this Beloved Son. And “we are witnesses to all that he did,” ear witnesses, chosen by God as those who have a story to tell about the life we live today and forever.

One week, I ran into a person walking into this worship space. I asked if he needed help; he had no idea who the jean wearing plaid shirt man happened to be...he said, "No, I come each day to a 12 Step Group (one of 15 that meets in this place!). I come in here because I love the words on the walls...I gather with my fellow addicts, we encourage one another, our Higher Power equips us to be sent out for another day in recovery. Do you believe that too?"

DO...YOU...BELIEVE THAT TOO?? I said, "I do, God bless you." And last week, he said, "I love the tree, so much light." So, much light! Relationship established and one day, as the Spirit leads, the words of witness will lead and God will bless again the sharing of good news!

Beloved, I hope you are ALL IN...into the work we share in mission, in a time of change and renewal. Our 61st year as a growing congregation. There is much for us to do as those who hold dual citizenship. And we will share what it means to be a community in change, discipleFIT, in a time to DEEPEN, RENEW, AND ENGAGE.

The Cross of Christ, on our brow at the "Jordan of the Font" as we are named and claimed "In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." Amen.