

## **WELCOME 13<sup>th</sup> January 2019 – 1 Epiphany '19 C**

Ecclesiastes 3:1-14 & Luke 3:15-17 & 21-22

Good morning! Welcome to worship today!

It is great to have you here. Please stay with us for morning tea after worship so we can get a chance to know one another better...

The trees are put up. The lights are packed up. The fireworks have blown up. New calendars are hung up. Now what? Another 350-odd days & we do it all over again? Is there something "new" in the "new year"? Here's the deal?

God delights in you & desires to fill you & fulfil you in his love. Whatever the year, age, circumstance or condition, God's desire is to pour his life into you in its fullest: life that always renews always refreshes is never ending & connects you with God's eternal purpose.

Now...What if you lived every day affirming that? What if you could start, go through & finish every day knowing deep in your heart that God delights in you & desires to fill & fulfil you in his love? What if you lived every day with the certainty that the Father is engaged in every circumstance of your life...that he has a purpose for you in each day...and that he seeks to fill you with the capacity & courage to share his life & love with the people around you?

The coming of Jesus Re-News our relationship with the Father & *that*, your relationship w/ God the Father, is the one relationship in life you cannot mess up. You did not establish it. It's not dependent on your success, or lack of it, your abilities or lack of them, what you do or don't do. You ARE God's beloved. He loves you deeply & completely, now & for eternity & calls you into his world with the message of his gift of salvation & love/life without end in his presence.

We'll explore & experience that together today...

### **PRAYER OF THE DAY**

Eternal Father, at the baptism of Jesus you revealed him to be your Son, and anointed him with the Holy Spirit. Keep all who are born of water and the Spirit faithful to their calling as your people; bold in witness to your saving love, and diligent in daily repentance and turning to you in all things...through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

## 1 EPIPHANY '19 C – A TIME OF NO REGRETS: RE-NEW

### FAITH CHAT:

1. Renew means to 'make new again.' What do you need God to make new again in you in 2019?
2. What effect do you want your faith to have on your life?

One of the cool things about moving was I'm getting to go through a bunch of old books...keeping some & discarding others...should have done long before now! But there are some great finds...Brennan Manning was a RC lay-priest, author, speaker: "While the impostor draws their identity from past achievements & the adulation of others, the true self claims identity in its belovedness." Far too many folks in this world live estranged from that simple truth & far too much harm results.

My mind sometimes works in odd ways because *THAT* got me thinking again about Martin Luther & his battles with the devil...Luther saw himself besieged regularly by Ol' Scratch...temptation, self-doubt, awareness of his own unworthiness/sinfulness, his faith struggles...he pointed straight at the devil & laid the blame at his feet. He saw evil as very real & would often shout at the tempter/deceiver, throwing ink wells around his monk's cell & quoting scripture to drive back the power of evil & its attacks. He found his best weapon against evil/sin/temptation/despair was a straightforward reminder, "I am baptized!" Or some variation....devil be gone!

The connection is clear...Luther discovered that his identity as a chosen, claimed, adopted-by-baptism, died for/risen for/forgiven child of God was the most powerful weapon in his possession against the varied attacks from <sup>w/in</sup> & <sup>w/out</sup> that he endured

And *THAT* reminded me that we were almost up to the year anniversary of OUR trip down to the river where the promise of God's Word & the physical element of water united to grant forgiveness, life, salvation...where the Spirit came (no dove this time but no less real) & where we were all privileged to hear in that moment "You are my dearly loved child! You bring me great joy!"

Now I know for Luther, & I know for me, & I suspect for Bec & each of you...that application of water & the word – that promise that declaration that assurance does not make you bullet-proof. I wish I could say to the struggles & difficulties of my life, "I am baptized! Grief, sadness, frustration, impatience be gone" & poof they're gone. If only...Despite my baptism I have, like every one of you, suffered sorrows & losses, encountered difficulties & struggles, still made bad decisions, still found myself on the wrong side of a choice, had to face the mountains & earthquakes in life I would rather have avoided. But at the same time...there is great strength in reaffirming that my/your existence, identity, & value are not limited to time & space; not confined to the things we have done or left undone. We *know* or *should know* ourselves to be more than this biological existence...driven solely by instinct or impulse...not victims of circumstance or condition. We *know* or *should know* there is more to this life than what we can stuff into our Super or spend in our lifetime. We *know* or *should know* ourselves as beloved in Christ because we are baptized into him. "For you were buried with Christ when you were baptized. And you were raised to new life with him because you trusted the mighty power of God, who raised Christ from the dead. You were dead because of your sins & because your sinful nature was not yet cut away. Then God made you alive with Christ, for he forgave all our sins." Col 2:12-13

But that application of water & the word – that promise that declaration that assurance does not make us bullet-proof. No one wishes it did more than I do. Yet when I look at Jesus...I see in the 3 accounts of his baptism, (Lk 3, Mt 3, Mk 1) the very next thing he experiences...direct attack by the enemy...temptation in the wilderness. Jesus is attacked/tempted at precisely the level of every temptation we face – Jesus is attacked/tempted precisely where we are: our identity in relationship w/ the Father

When we are unsure, mistrustful or insecure in that relationship...when we are unsure, mistrustful or insecure of our child-of-God identity...when we are unsure, mistrustful or insecure of our belovedness...of the joy the Father finds in us...what happens? We hear what Jesus heard: "If you are..." the devil said...or what the tempter said to Eve & Adam "Did God really say..." I don't know how you hear that voice...doubt...slander...challenge to your child-ship but that's the place where Jesus stands in your place...however you hear it feel it experience it...that's the place where his strength stands in place of your weakness...that's the place where his righteousness replaces your sinfulness...that's the place where his faithfulness is exchanged for your disobedience.

Look...Jesus has no sin of which to repent & Jesus brings a far greater baptism...right? So as Jesus is baptized, what is he doing? Why? He is doing one thing according to the will & purpose of the Father. Jesus is baptized to unite himself with sinners. He - the Sinless One is doing what sinners do. He is being baptized & in doing so, He is standing in your place.

He is becoming what you are so that you will become what he is. He is becoming what you are so that He can take your sin/guilt/punishment to the cross. In short, Jesus is doing everything necessary to make you right with God. But before He can make you right with God, Jesus first has to become what makes you wrong with God.

In being crucified, every human sin is charged against Jesus...all of it...from the garden to the gulags. That's why Jesus came to be baptized, to take into himself the sin of the world, yours & mine included so that in dying/rising *"He canceled the record of the charges against us & took it away by nailing it to the cross."* Col 2:14 That was the prophets' promise: "The Lord laid on him the sins of us all." (Is. 53:6) That was the apostles' sermon: *"For God made Christ, who never sinned, to become sin itself so that we could be made right with God."* (2 Cor. 5:21)

Last week...we noted that John shows up out in the wilderness with a simple word from God: "We are messed up & we need a new start w/ God & w/ our own lives." And all of Judea & Jerusalem went out to hear him & be baptized by him. Now why did they do that...drop everything & run off to the Jordan to get dunked by a guy who smells of camel, honey & bugs? Because what John said was true. They knew their own hearts & lives. They saw what went on in the streets of their towns & villages. They watched the Romans crush their country. They knew the stories of their ancestors' idolatry & the idolatry they pursued. They could look around & know that we humans have a habit of doing life badly...folks get hurt folks get lost folks get stampeded & left behind...Even John knows that in the face of the One who is to come, he's a dog's breakfast...Compared to the Holy Spirit & fire he's just muddy river water. He understands that what's needed is for our lives to be threshed, winnowed, sifted & set alight in God's presence...At best John can only point to that deep need with a promise that God will accomplish his purpose in each of us.

We are messed up & we need a new start w/ God & w/ our own lives & in Christ God does it for us

*For we died & were buried with Christ by baptism. And just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glorious power of the Father, now we also may live new lives. Since we have been united with him in his death, we will also be raised to life as he was. We know that our old sinful selves were crucified with Christ so that sin might lose its power in our lives. We are no longer slaves to sin. For when we died with Christ we were set free from the power of sin. And since we died with Christ, we know we will also live with him.*

– Rom 6:4-8

In Jesus...dripping with water...bleeding/dying on the cross...risen & reigning with the scars still visible God renews for us an old old promise

*"Do not be afraid, for I have redeemed you. I have called you by name; you are mine.*

*When you go through deep waters, I will be with you.*

*When you go through rivers of difficulty, you will not drown.*

*When you walk through the fire of oppression, you will not be burned up;  
the flames will not consume you.*

*For I am the Lord, your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior...*

*Because you are precious to me. You are honored, and I love you.*

*Do not be afraid, for I am with you..."* Is 43:1-4

Jesus came to renew & fulfil that promise...to say with utmost clarity: God delights in you & desires to fill you & fulfil you in his love. Whatever the year, age, circumstance or condition, God's desire is to pour his life into you in its fullest: life that always renews always refreshes is never ending & connects you with God's eternal purpose...drawing this sinful world back to his heart.

What if you lived every day affirming that? What if you could start, go through & finish every day knowing deep in your heart that God delights in you & desires to fill & fulfil you in his love? What if you lived every day with the certainty that the Father is engaged in every circumstance of your life...that he has a purpose for you in each day...and that he seeks to fill you with the capacity & courage to share his life & love with the people around you?

What do you need God to make new again in you in 2019?

What effect do you want your faith to have on your life?

Let's pray with that in mind: **Father put to death in me everything but your presence. Bring to life in me only the image of your Son and the power of your Spirit. Wash me not just with water but with your love and promise to make all things new by your Spirit. Claim me again today as your child and set me to work boldly proclaiming your Kingdom of grace wherever I am. In Jesus' Name...Amen.**