

Baptism of the Lord

David Beckmann

RCL: Isaiah 42:1-9; Psalm 29; Acts 10:34-43; Matthew 3:13-17

LM: Isaiah 42:1-4, 6-7; Psalm 29:1-2, 3-4, 3, 9-10; Acts 10:34-38; Matthew 3:13-17

John's baptism of Jesus and the proclamation of Christ as the beloved Son of God establish Jesus as the broker of God's reign on earth. In our own baptism we turned away from sin, and God called us as beloved children. Our self-centered identities were drowned, and we were raised out of the water as agents of God's kingdom.

In Isaiah 42 we get a clear picture that justice and righteousness are key aspects of God's kingdom. God's justice is rooted in lifting up those who are oppressed and marginalized: those in prison, those who are blind, those in darkness. For the biblical audience, opening blind people's eyes is not simply a miraculous physical healing. In those times people with disabilities or disease were outcasts who were rejected from society and considered sinners. As God opens blind people's eyes and releases prisoners, God is also restoring right relationships among people, lifting up the downtrodden and returning them to wholeness in community. The Lord has taken us by the hand and called us to be instruments of justice and righteousness.

Peter confirms Jesus' justice mission in Acts 10, as he preaches peace through Jesus and tells the story of Jesus "doing good and healing all who were oppressed" (v. 38). Peter issues a broad invitation to God's kingdom. God's justice-reign includes all people, Jews and Gentiles, sinners alike, calling us all to lives of fullness, freed from sin, loved by God. Peter preaches that all can be baptized and receive forgiveness of sins through Jesus' name. In turn, we then share the good news of God's forgiveness, of the new relationship we enjoy with God and one another, and of God's coming kingdom among us.

Some biblical images for God's kingdom, like blind people seeing or a lion lying with the lamb, seem impossible. But in baptism we have experienced some of the impossible becoming possible as our sins are forgiven and strangers become sisters and brothers.

The Bible often compares God's kingdom to a banquet or makes sharing food a means of filling deep hunger (Matt 14:13-21; Matt 22:1-14). God clearly intends for all people to have enough to eat. When people in our neighborhoods and around the world are hungry, we cannot claim we are in right relationship with them. One way we live out our baptism and share the good news of God's kingdom is by helping struggling people get enough to eat.

Ending world hunger may seem to be one of those impossible dreams. Yet in fact God graciously has given to humanity in our time the technology and resources to end widespread hunger. Stronger commitment from our nation's people and government are pivotal in making progress against hunger in our own country and worldwide. We can

take part in hunger ministries in our community and support church-sponsored development programs in poor countries. We can also urge our elected representatives to ensure that the U.S. government does its part by providing hungry families with assistance and opportunity.

We are baptized into children of God. Tackling the problem of world hunger is not too much for us.

Children's Time [Larry Hollar]

Take the children to the place where baptisms are done in the church. Show them the water and remind them that Jesus was baptized, and so were we. Ask what they remember about baptisms they've seen in church. Being baptized changes us and says to the world that we are God's children. That means that other people are our sisters and brothers in God's eyes—people in our congregation and around the world—and so we care for them, especially when they need food and shelter. Water can do amazing things!

Musical Suggestions [Larry Hollar]

Wade in the Water—CH 371

Now the Silence—UMH 619

Breathe on Me, Breath of God—BP 88

God Has Chosen Me—GC 682