

Wade in the Water

This past Sunday we would have been celebrating the Baptism of our Lord and, but for the snow, we would have been renewing our own Baptismal Vows.

Baptism is our public declaration that we are God's person, God's child, and collectively, God's people. Living out of our baptism as individuals or a community of faith finds its deepest expression when we accept, with all of its terrifying beauty and consequence, that we are beloved of God.

Like Jesus rising out of the Jordan, all of us are already called and already chosen by God. In the end it is simply up to us to decide to live our lives strengthened and empowered by that love.

Jesus goes down into the waters of baptism and immerses himself in our humanity; he claims solidarity with the human condition. He does not deny our fragility or fickleness, he simply opens a window to show us the possibility of our own lives and what a life lived as God's beloved might mean for us and for the life of the world.

Baptism is saying yes to God. Deciding to say yes to God is something most of us have to do over and over and over again throughout our lives, for me sometimes, when humanities cruelty is on display, it seems I have to decide again several times a day.

Will I make this or that decision my way or God's way, will I respond to some insult my way or God's way, will I decide to spend my money my way or God's way. Will I love this person or that person my way or God's way?

Claiming our place as a child of God, claiming our inheritance as a brother or sister to Jesus one of the most wonderful, liberating, life-giving, terrifying things we might do. It frees us from so many things but it does have great

implications for our lives.

When we decide to be God's person we are claiming that God is truly alive and present in our world; present in a way that refuses to participate with injustice, exclusion, or oppression.

All of this means engaging God's life. Just saying that—it sounds rather auspicious, doesn't it? But that's what we do here. We promise ourselves to God—we invoke God's power; we claim God's fellowship. I wonder if we really get that?

Annie Dillard expressed the startling nature of what we're about as those who are God's people better than anyone I know.

She suggests that we often don't fully comprehend what we're about as we come to church week after week. She writes:

"On the whole, I do not find Christians, outside the catacombs, sufficiently sensible of the conditions. Does anyone have the foggiest idea what sort of power we so blithely invoke? Or, as I suspect, does no one believe a word of it? The churches are children playing on the floor with their chemistry sets, mixing up a batch of TNT to kill a Sunday morning. It is madness to wear ladies' straw hats and velvet hats to church; we should all be wearing crash helmets. Ushers should issue life preservers and signal flares;

they should lash us to our pews. For the sleeping god may wake some day and take offense, or the waking god may draw us out to where we can never return."

Crash helmets in the pews.... It's an intriguing idea. I'm not sure if most of us ever believe our lives here could ever be so risky and dangerous. When I think of most of what I do, I don't know that I need a crash helmet. It feels pretty tame. But when I think of what we're actually called to be up to I want to run to the nearest helmet store.

In Epiphany we celebrate Jesus' the revelation of God. The one who bears God's Spirit and brings God's love and justice to the world. All of this feels much safer if we believe our call in baptism is simply to worship Jesus. But, the terrifying truth is that we were never called to worship Jesus we were called to follow Jesus.

We are called to follow him into seeing those on the margins as part of ourselves. We are called to follow him into the religious institution and challenge any brand of religion that places barriers between God and God's people. We are called to follow him to the borders of racial, gender, and ethnic boundaries and tear down their artificial divisions.

And maybe most challenging of all, we are called to follow him into a forgiveness that is never ending, into peace that demands we love our enemies and into a vulnerability that will allow the world to break our hearts.

And it all begins when we follow Jesus down into the water.

That is where we become the church, where we become Christ's body. We are the way that Christ's love and power are manifest in the world.

Whatever we see revealed about Jesus in Epiphany, it is the revelation of our truth as well.

Had we gathered on Sunday I would have charged you with listening closely to our baptismal vows and asked what would our lives really look like to live them in a way that means we would need a crash helmet? Most of you have a Book of Common Prayer—I encourage you to pull them out right now and read those vows.

If we go down with Jesus into the waters of baptism and immerse ourselves in his divinity; if we saturate ourselves in God's will and God's way—it is then we claim the possibility of our own lives and what a life lived as God's beloved might mean for us and for the life of the world.

Our call is to simply wade on in the water and discover that the water which is troubled by Jesus' relentless call is indeed just fine.