

January 15, 2023 Baptism of Jesus Sunday
Rev. Jen Nagel, University Lutheran Church of Hope

Isaiah 42:1-9, Acts 10:34-43
Mathew 3:13-17

[Marked for a Purpose, by Kathleen Norris, December 25, 2007. https://www.christiancentury.org/article/2007-12/marked-purpose?code=HPJDxmfz3slSBTYNokp&utm_source=Christian+Century+Newsletter&utm_campaign=9ac62cea99-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_SCP_2023-01-02&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_b00cd618da-9ac62cea99-86340259]

Practicing Baptism

Grace and peace to you, beloved of Christ Jesus. Amen.

I'm curious what you are practicing these days.

Think for a moment: What are you practicing? (pause)

Our 9 year old is practicing cross country skiing and folding creations origami style.

Last night at supper she had us all practicing tongue twisters.

Our 13 year old is practicing the art of hair dying.

With their friends, our lower level seems to have become the place to bleach and color one another's hair.

The tones are fantastic.

What are you practicing?

I find myself practicing patience, and slowing down.

On weeks when I'm preaching I begin praying on and thinking about the scripture on Mondays.

This week was no exception. As I walked in the dim early Monday morning light,

the word that came to me over and over again was **Practice**.

I was thinking about Jesus' baptism in that mucky Jordan River.

In Matthew's rendition, Jesus may not have *needed* to be baptized

(that little back and forth with John is telling).

But Jesus *wanted* to be baptized, he wanted to fulfill the promises.

Baptism is an act of solidarity with humanity: I'm in it with you, in the water, in the flesh.

And then all of a sudden the heavens are parting:

"This is my child, my beloved, with whom I am well pleased."

This is the first time we meet Jesus as an adult in Matthew's gospel.

In the verses that follow, Jesus is led into the wilderness to be tempted,

then he'll emerge into rest of his ministry.

But right here, in the second of the great Epiphanies,

Jesus shows up, present, revealed, God with skin on. Jesus shows up.

And he's teaching us how to *show up*.

Kathleen Norris writes,

“Baptism ... is about celebrating the incomparable gift we receive as creatures beloved of God.”

And then she goes on,

“Baptism is also about more fully engaging the responsibility that this identity entails.”

And that, my friends, is where Practicing comes in.

We are called to Practice Our Baptisms. Daily.

We are called to be so grounded in this identity of being God’s beloved children that

when the wilderness of change and injustice comes,

when forgiveness is our only hope,

when temptation or grief or sickness or addiction or exhaustion

or hard choices are before us (because they will be, they are),

when life nears its end,

this identity as God’s beloved is all we have, all we are,

and it is precisely ENOUGH.

You are a beloved child of God, with you God is well pleased.

A couple of you reached out the other day, thinking of your young grandchild,

“What ideas do you have, Pastor Jen, for sharing our faith at home?”

My response is simple: Practice your faith and let them be part of it.

If you’re praying before a meal or talking about the news of the day,

let your faith be present, real, shown, shared, practiced.

If you’re reading books, Why not include a story from the SPARK Story Bible?

If you’re giving food or money or time, share that act, that choice.

Set up the nativity creche and let them play with all the parts.

Go together to the state capital or city hall, stand up for justice together.

Let the bath water remind us of God’s great love,

and the dinner table remind us of God’s wide welcome.

When tensions arise, let grace be a guide.

Use the language of forgiveness, start fresh because God is like that.

Jesus’ baptism grounds his every move.

Similarly, our baptisms are the core of our life of faith, so in a word, well two words: Practice Baptism.

You are a beloved child of God, with you God is well pleased. Practice Baptism.

But let me say this carefully: I am not asking you to practice perfection.

Nor certitude.

Nor someone else's faith.

The church certainly has intentionally and unintentionally done that over the years.

That is not helpful, and, frankly, it's not faithful.

Rather practice your baptism, and together as a faithful community let us practice our baptism.

Practice showing up in your own skin, beauty, baggage, history, and all.

Practice living with the complexity of this life, this faith in Jesus Christ.

On this MLK weekend, we're reminded again of that complexity

as people of faith and educators speak about the actions at Hamline University,

and as the heartbreaking news comes out of Keenan Anderson's death at the hands of the LAPD.

Dear ones, practice a mix of bold and gutsy trust (I mean, you are marked with the cross of Christ, no less!)

and honest humility, willing, ready to be changed, discomfited by the Holy Spirit.

That's what the world needs.

Last Sunday as we celebrated Epiphany,

we had a dozen or so stations set up around our worship space-

using a map for prayer, lighting candles, making lanterns, writing gratitude, and more.

People moved about, Epiphany holy movement, we called it.

After you got going, I found myself watching our community *practice*.

It is incredibly moving to witness you practicing your faith.

A few of the stations are still up for you to engage this morning and over the next weeks of Epiphany.

Dear friends, on Monday morning long time Hope member, Marcheta Scribner, died, she was 90 years old.

As we do when members of this community die, I'll share a little about Marcheta and then we'll pray.

Marcheta grew up in Canby, Minnesota, near the South Dakota border.

Early on, Marcheta was an elementary school teacher.

She loved children, and she loved music.

Musicals and folks songs of all kinds were some of her favorites,

as well as *I Am So Glad Each Christmas Eve*, in Norwegian,

and in these later years: *Jesus Loves Me*.

Marcheta married Duane Scribner in the summer of 1953.

Together they had five girls: Kirsten (that's Kirsten Mebust who is still active here at Hope),

Lisa, Kathy, Maria, and Emily, and 10 grandkids and 5 great-grand kids.

Over the years, the family lived around Minnesota
then for a stretch in Washington D.C
while Duane served as Chief of Staff for Senator Walter Mondale,
and then returning, they settled in Prospect Park.

Marcheta and Duane were a strong pair, deeply connected to one another,

and to a whole network of leaders in state and national government,
the humanities, the University of Minnesota and higher education.
Hospitality was at Marcheta's core, she loved to host a good party.
Growing up poor she was resourceful, sewing everything, making do.
She was wise and smart and generous, committed to service and social justice,
angry at the injustice of the world,
fierce in her love for *her* children, and *all* children.

Around Hope, Marcheta was involved in Mother's Circle, Gloria Circle, she taught Sunday School,
coordinated weddings, was a leader in the rummage sale,
and served on the Board with a focus on congregational care and nurture.

For the last 25 years or so, Marcheta has lived with dementia and Alzheimers.
A Memorial Service for Marcheta will be held in late July when her family comes together.

When members of this congregation die,

we remember how the waters that first washed over them in baptism, hold them now in death.
We pray at the baptismal waters, linking ourselves to God's powerful waters of promise.

Holy God, holy and powerful, we remember before you today our sister Marcheta Scribner. We thank you for giving her to us to know and to love as a companion in our pilgrimage on earth. At these waters of baptism, you welcomed her into your love. At these waters, you comforted her in times of trouble and encouraged her in delight. At these waters, you now enfold her into Jesus' death and resurrection and the promise of life everlasting. Console us who mourn and bring us together to feast with Marcheta all the saints at rest. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

In this time I invite you, if you'd like, to come forward,

dipping into the baptismal waters,
marking the cross on your own forehead, or the forehead of someone else who is consenting,
using words such as "Remember, You are a beloved child of God" or "Practice Baptism."