

2025 01 12 – *Water in the Font*

Scripture: **Luke 3:15-17, 21-22** (*The Inclusive Bible*)

John, the son of Elizabeth and Zechariah, is in the desert near the Jordan River. He is preaching the importance of repentance, of turning to God and of caring for our neighbours. John is also inviting his followers to be baptized in the Jordan River.

So what does it mean to be baptized? In our tradition, baptism is a sacrament, and sacraments are “visible signs of an invisible grace.” Sacraments, like baptism and communion,” are ways that we ritualize and visualize the unconditional love of the Holy Mystery. They are the ways that we remind ourselves of the love and the mercy of God. They are ways that we remind ourselves that we are not alone.

Each sacrament has its own symbols. In communion we have the bread and the cup. In baptism the symbol is water. We pour the water into the font so that everyone can see its wonderful life-giving clarity and hear the splash as it hits the bowl. This water represents the spirit of God, the presence of the Sacred. In the sacrament of baptism, we are reminded that all living things require water and Spirit for survival. It is from the water in the womb that we are born, it is with the Holy Spirit that we experience rebirth. Water also has wonderful cleansing and healing properties, just as the Holy Mystery has the power to heal or transform our lives. Water is a wonderful symbol of the power of the Holy Mystery in our lives.

John was encouraging the people of Judea to be baptized as a way of showing their repentance, their desire to turn to, to connect more deeply with their God. For John, baptism was a visual representation of the transforming power of Sacred Love. John baptized by full immersion in the waters of the Jordan. As his followers rose out of the water, it was as if the people were starting all over again, it was as if they were being reborn.

In the United Church we typically baptize infants and small children. Water is a key element of the sacrament, but rather than being immersed the children are generously sprinkled with water. When children are baptized, the meaning is slightly different. We are not suggesting that these innocent children need to be cleansed or transformed. When children are baptized, it is the parents who are making a promise that their offspring will be brought up to understand the love of the Holy Mystery and the story of Jesus the Christ. It is the members of the congregation who promise to care for and nurture the faith of each child.

Baptism in the United Church is one of the ways that we welcome both children and adults into our faith community. It is, in effect, a sacrament of initiation into the Christian life. It marks the beginning of a journey of faith and discipleship that lasts throughout one's life.

As the people of Judea listen to John and are baptized in the waters of the Jordan, they start to wonder if this prophet in the desert might be the Messiah that they have been waiting for, the one who will free the descendants of Abraham from their Roman oppressors. But John assures them that he is just

the messenger. He says that “someone is coming who is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not fit to untie!” John wasn’t naming any names, but we all know who he was referring to. It was, of course, his cousin, Jesus.

“When all the people were baptized, Jesus also came to be baptized.” It is kind of mind-blowing to think that Jesus was there at the Jordan River with all the other followers of John. Jesus who many believe was God Incarnate or at least, one of the most spiritual people to ever live. Jesus, the revolutionary healer and teacher. Jesus who was known as the Messiah, the Christ. Jesus, the one, whose life and teachings we all follow as members of the Christian Church.

It just goes to show that arrogance has no place in Christian discipleship. If Jesus came to be baptized, came to be reminded of God’s grace, came to open himself to God’s healing and transforming love, then how can any of us ever think that we have arrived, that we are complete or perfect? It is a wonderful reminder of our need to live humble, unpretentious lives of ongoing healing, growth and transformation.

The scripture goes on to describe Jesus’ baptism saying, “And while Jesus was praying, the skies opened and the Holy Spirit descended on the Anointed One in visible form, like a dove.” It is true that there were and are white doves that live in the area around the Jordan River. It is very possible that an actual dove was present at the time of Jesus’ baptism. The dove, like the water in the river or in the font, is a visible sign of the presence of the Holy Spirit. You will find this

symbol my baptismal stole, you will find it on the crest of the United Church of Canada and in churches all over the world.

Today's scripture concludes with a voice from heaven saying to Jesus: "You are my Own, my Beloved. On you my favor rests." Yes, with this line, the author of the Gospel of Luke is emphasizing the fact that Jesus was God's beloved and that the Holy Mystery would be there to support him throughout his life and ministry. But this was not only true for Jesus. This is true for all of us. We are all beloved children of God. We are all God's own. The favor, or love of the Holy Mystery is with each one of us.

So at this time I would like to offer you the opportunity to remember your baptism and to re-affirm your faith by coming to the font for a blessing. I will use the water and place the sign of the cross on your forehead. Even if you haven't been baptized, you are welcome to come and receive this sign of God's love for you. This is not a full baptism, but rather a blessing and a reminder that we are all God's own. The words I will be using are the same ones that the voice from heaven spoke to Jesus, "You are my Own, my Beloved. On you my favor rests."

So now as the choir sings, "Come to the Water," you are all welcome to come. Come to the font and receive this symbol of God's presence in our lives. Come, remember your baptism. Come and be blessed.