

Baptism of Jesus Prayers Sunday, January 10, 2021

Celebrations

Birthdays

January 11th Noreena Satchell (95)
 12th Gracie McPherson (16)
 13th Briar Ruddock
 16th Amy Dale
 16th Marion Lammiman
 16th Danielle Ralf

Prayer Concerns

Jenny & family	Carol Ashton
Cathy Tredenick	Jean Lammiman
Larry Seabrook	Pete (Rona's brother)
Marilyn Cartwright	Carl & Leena & family
Jason Carnegie	George Eastbury
Sally Paul	Mabel Somerville
Judy Jacklin	
Rae Axford	
Graham family	

PASTORAL PRAYER IN RHYME

**Gracious God and Lord of all
 to you we pray, upon your mercy we call,
 Bless us today and help us to be
 your sons and daughters in word and in deed.**

**Grant us your Spirit; holy and good
 to do acts of kindness wherever we should.
 Open our eyes to see other points of view
 then open our lips to speak wisdom true.**

**Grant us your peace when troubles abound.
 In amazing grace may our hopes be found!
 We pray for an end to Covid-19's control.
 We pray for healing and blessing for all!**

**We pray for the Earth, that we will renew
 our vow to conserve, recycle, and reuse.
 For violence to end, for compassion to win,
 O God we will need forgiveness from sin—**

**We confess our need! Forgive us we pray!
 Help us all to do better, beginning today.
 Bless, O God, all who are sick or so frail,
 Find ones who have lost their way or have failed**

themselves or others. Lift them up, we pray!
In the love of Jesus, may they find their way.

Be with our Church and our community, too.
Apart, but together we faithfully serve You!
We'll share the good news of a Gift like no other—
Abiding Love made Human, in Jesus, our Brother! Amen

Old Testament Genesis 1: 1-5

In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters. Then God said, "Let there be light"; and there was light. And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness. God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day.

Gospel Mark 1: 4-11

John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. And people from the whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem were going out to him, and were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. Now John was clothed with camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. He proclaimed, "The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the thong of his sandals. I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."

In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. And a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased."

Sermon: HOPE, HOPE, HOPE

This week one of my Facebook friends, as a way of commenting on the new year, posted a soliloquy from Charles Shultz's *Peanuts* Diva, Lucy. Lucy is 'holding forth' to poor old Charlie Brown: "I Hate this year! Everyone said that things would be better but its *not!* I don't think this is a new year at all....I THINK WE'VE BEEN STUCK WITH A *USED YEAR!*"

Even though the expiry of 2020 was met by most of us with a sense of relief, we knew that turning the page on our calendar would not magically stop the Covid-19 virus in its tracks. Our hearts break for the people who are suffering. We pray for families who have lost loved ones to this disease or other causes. We are frustrated that we cannot hug the grieving ones or visit sick or elderly relatives as we would do in normal times. As Barbara, our card steward wrote in this month's newsletter, we are living through a time, which is "difficult and unchartered". Hence our feelings of angst, sadness and frustration. Those feelings are very normal in abnormal times. There is no shame in feeling down or discouraged or sad. These feelings just prove that we are human beings. But thankfully,

God gives us spiritual, material and human resources to deal with the challenges before us. Isn't it amazing how even in trying times, we can find reasons to laugh or feel grateful? For example, when I read the comic strip conversation from Schultz's Lucy, that I quoted earlier, I had to laugh. I was thankful for the reminder that that laughter is often the best medicine. Another spiritual gift that is so important in our lives every day, but especially when we are feeling overwhelmed is the gift of hope. It's miraculous how hope can rise up from the ashes of difficult situations. I was reminded of hope's resilience on Friday when former US Congresswoman Gabby Giffords was interviewed by Savannah Guthrie on NBC. Last Friday marked the 10th anniversary of the tragic shooting event in Arizona that killed 6 people and almost took Gabby's life. Her ability to talk and walk were so severely affected that the doctors did not know if she would heal. She has had a remarkably hard rehabilitation but she was able to give a moving speech at the Democratic National Convention last year about ending gun violence. Then this week, she found herself waiting on news about the welfare of her husband, Arizona's newest Senator. He was working in the Capital building as the Trump mob overran the building. Thankfully he was not injured in the attempted coup. After all that trauma upon trauma, Gabby Giffords message on the 10th Anniversary of the shooting that almost ended her life said: *"Be a leader, set an example, be passionate, be your best."* Then she raised up her head smiled her beautiful smile, and exclaimed: *"Hope, Hope, Hope!"* Even though a world-wide pandemic is new to us, many people have endured plagues, wars, droughts, and other crises. The testimonies of such people who have suffered, endured and thrived, give the world so much hope! *Hope that has been refined in the fire, shines brightest, doesn't it?*

Over the last 10 months there have been many stories and examples of hope in the midst of Covid. *Do you have a story that you heard in your family circle, community or media that encourages you to keep hoping through this long, hard season of waiting?*

Someone in the media recently remarked that many people tend to turn or return to their religious faith in a crisis. One of the reasons why this happens, it's believed, is that religion or an established Faith offers a framework and a system of belief that has stood the test of time and has proven to be secure and sure. Religious tenets and rituals provide people a sense of security, comfort and continuity amidst times of uncertainty and uncomfortable change. Every once in awhile I take the highway back to the Jerseyville community where I grew up. Even though so much has changed since I left over 3 decades ago the neighborhood still holds an air of familiarity. My roots are there. My people came from there. The things that I grew up learning about God, life and myself I learned there. When times get tough, when a crisis comes, whether personal or otherwise, we retrace our steps back to our spiritual roots, our spiritual home which tells us who we are, where we come from and to whom we belong.

A faith with its teachings, songs, prayers, traditions, rituals and people is our spiritual hometown.

The stories of our faith, and the examples set by our ancestors or spiritual ancestors which we adopt along the way, or who adopt us, become the channel through which the Holy Spirit reaches out, embraces us and claims us as Gods' own. To be sure people reach and understanding of God in other ways outside of church or synagogue or Temple. But there is just something about a story, a poem, a song, a ritual that reaches us in our deepest places and connects us to each other and to the Divine Mystery that we call God. Two of

those stories were read today from our Holiest Book. The first was just the opening verses of a magnificent poem which was never meant to be a historical document or scientific treatise detailing how the Earth came about.

Genesis 1 is a statement of faith! It is a poetic rendering of that which is so mysterious, so awesome, so divine that it cannot be adequately explained in words.

We don't know who first put this simple yet profound hymn to God and Creation together. It's written in a way that could be easily memorized. Seven miracles on seven days.

Scholars believe that this version of Genesis 1 was likely written down and compiled over the years that the people of Israel lived in Babylon as exiles, or right after they returned back to their homeland. That would put the date of composition at around 400 years before Jesus was born.

The creation stories which were likely circulated for centuries among Abraham's family in oral form were finally written down by a generation of people who were living through very, stressful, chaotic times. Just as Barb commented about our times, *their times* were difficult and unchartered. The Jews who lived in exile, were prisoners and refugees. They were living in someone else's country as fourth-class citizens. The Temple and all the familiar items of worship along with the scripture scrolls had been left behind in Jerusalem. They had likely been burned to ashes by the conquering Babylonians. The exiles who, after 40 years, returned a place where strange people were living on their family farms and homesteads. Nothing around them resembled the things that their grandfathers and grandmothers had told them about their lost homeland. They had to rebuild their lives literally from the ground up. The returned exiles began by restoring the walls of their Temple and writing down the stories of their beginnings--- as they had been told to them by their elders who had died while still in exile.

Genesis. The Exodus. The prayers and psalms of Kings David and Solomon. The sermons of God's prophets. In those stories, which included the poetic statement of faith in one God, their God, the Creator of all people found hope to carry on!

Genesis 1 was all about hope. Hope in knowing that God made people in his image. Hope that they could have a relationship of meaning and love with their Creator and with the Earth.

Hope in knowing that in every season, God can bring blessing. Hope in a God who called them very good. Hope in a God who can shape something orderly and awe inspiring from the depths of chaos and void. *And there was morning, and there was evening. Another day to follow another day.*

Similarly, the stories about Jesus, the Messiah, the Son of God was written by generations of people who looked to their faith and to the teachings of their faith to find reason to hope while living through difficult, often desperate, chaotic times. From our 21st Century vantage point, it's easy to miss that the gospels that proclaim the good news of the coming of a Saviour were written down during a time when Jews and Christians in Palestine experienced suffering and persecution. This past week, on January 6, Canadians, Americans and nations around the world watched in amazement and dismay as a mob of white Trump supporters stormed the Capital building of the United States of America. Five people died and many others suffered injuries. Government offices were left in disarray. Dozens of lives including that of the Vice President and Vice President in waiting, were placed in jeopardy. That was a very bad and sad day. Likewise, the early church who gathered the orally given stories of Jesus and wrote them down were eye witnesses to

Roman soldiers, who invaded their capital city and ransacked it. They reduced the great Temple that the exiles had built 4 centuries earlier, to rubble and burned it. The faithful disciples of Jesus had to flee to the mountains and to lands beyond to save their lives. In the midst of all that horror, destruction, and disruption, a person we know as Mark wrote down the story about a man sent from God, whose name was John. John was not the Messiah, Mark explained, but it was John who came to prepare his people for the arrival of the Kingdom of God. The Kingdom did surely arrive one day, as John was busy baptizing repentant sinners. But the kingdom did not descend from the sky like the Holy City in the book of Revelation's rendering. The Kingdom descended not as a city nor as a mob of devotees to a demagogue. The Kingdom of God came to the river with Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus walked into the water along with all those sinners and John baptized him. Then when Jesus rose up from the murky depths of that river, a voice from Heaven whispered into his ear. *"You are my Son, my beloved, in you I am well pleased."*

In Genesis 1 God made the first humans in his likeness. In Jesus, God made God in our likeness. In Genesis 1 God called all his creation good or very good. In Jesus, God called the one who brought the kingdom of God to the people God; Beloved. These two stories; two stories of two beginnings, the beginning of creation and the beginning of Jesus' ministry remind us that despite all the problems that surround us, whether of our making or of no one's choosing, we are God's good, very good creation. Despite our flaws if we follow Jesus' example of love for others, we bring a smile of delight to our Maker's face. The rich stories and teachings of our faith tell us what we so desperately need to hear and need to believe: At our core, humanity is good, very good. But sometimes we lose our way. Sometimes we stray from our spiritual homeland into a spiritual wasteland. The good news is, God always provides a way back. His name is Jesus, the king who waded into the dirty river with sinners, to show us that he knows us, believes in us and can raise us up from the depths to bring us to a better place.

Stories of hope and faith exist outside of Holy Writ. Some are better known than others. God knows them all. Martin Luther, one of the founders of Protestantism but would have preferred to be remembered as a passionate advocate for Church reform and *not* revolution, once said this about baptism. *"Every day when you wash your face, remember your baptism."*

We are living through difficult and uncharted times. Maybe it doesn't seem like a New Year, but a Used Year! Even though we are not free to do as we like, we will remember who we are. We belong to the God who calls us to love our neighbor as ourselves. We can celebrate the words, acts and expressions of love, care and kindness that we are blessed to receive and give. We will wash our hands carefully wear our face coverings in public to protect others from infection. We will look into the mirror each morning and as we splash our faces with water, we will remember our baptism by water and Spirit. We will give thanks for the God who made us good and who continues to bless us with *every* spiritual blessing... including hope.

Hope, hope, hope!

Amen.

