

## Morning Meditation ~ Baptism

As you read the meditations this week, I invite you to have a bowl of water in front of you. You may want to begin by pouring out the water, hearing it splash at the bottom of the bowl and even splatter onto the table. You may want to dip the tips of your fingers into the bowl. Pay attention to the sensations that are sent all the way from your fingertips to your brain.

Do you feel warmth or coolness?

What colors do you notice?

Can you maybe even see your reflection in the water?

Play in the water a bit, let your inner five-year-old-self loose with joy – especially because this year has not been easy.

Now, I invite you to wet your thumb and trace the outline of the cross on your forehead. Remember you are created in God's image. Remember God's liberating love that seeks to let loose in your words/actions/presence. Remember God's grace that feeds us and forms us every day. Remember, you are a beloved daughter and son of God.

Breathe into that truth.

Then read these words:

At that time Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan River so that John would baptize him. John tried to stop him and said, "I need to be baptized by you, yet you come to me?" Jesus answered, "Allow me to be baptized now. This is necessary to fulfill all righteousness."

Two quick insights about the passage for you to ponder. First, the setting of the Jordan River is a political statement. The Jordan was where Moses preached his final sermon on the wilderness side. Then mantle of leadership was passed to Joshua, who parted the Jordan River (just like Moses parted the Red Sea), the people walked through into the Promised Land. The Elders collected twelve stones from the river bottom that were holy, tactile, tangible reminders of God's presence. (If you want to read the whole story it is Joshua chapters 3-4). John didn't just choose the Jordan as a random site; the Jordan choose John as a holy place for people to gather to remember – remember our history. I wonder sometimes if we need to gather at the Potomac to remember our complicated and complex history as a country? That we have struggled with living our ideals as a nation with our own self-interest and individualism – to name that and then wash in the river renewing us to live as God's people.

Second, I love how John objects to doing this. Is there any part of you that struggles with fully living the claim of baptism? I do. I do with people who push all my buttons and take all my energy. Can I really show God's love to them? I struggle when my frustration fumes and comes out in words I immediately want to pull from the air and put them back in my mouth. Baptism is

God's unconditional and unceasing claim. We don't do anything to earn this claim of love and grace. It is. You are God's beloved.

Now touch the water again, letting that truth soak in and saturate your life today.

**Prayer: Let this water today remind me who and whose I am. I am (insert your name here), Your beloved, O God, let that truth loose in my life. Amen and Amen.**

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When I think of baptism, in the back of my mind there is a melody that starts softly, tenderly. Soon the words wash over me like I just dove into a pool of water:

As I went down in the river to pray  
Studying about that good ol' way  
And who shall wear the starry crown  
Good Lord, show me the way.

O sisters, let's go down  
Let's go down, come on down  
O sisters, let's go down  
Down in the river to pray

It is that final line of the first stanza, "Good Lord, show me the way," that catches me. I can sing that sweetly and hopefully where all the syllables come out evenly. Or I can sing those words exasperated, exhausted where I emphasize the "Good Lord," part and the words, "show me the way," come out like a prayerful plea for such a time as this.

What hymn starts humming in your heart today?

Shall we gather at the river? Classic!

Wade in the water? Absolutely – that is a beautiful spiritual connecting us to the truths of God's creative and liberating love.

I Was There to Hear Your Boring Cry? Oh, that one always makes me tear up and think about my kids' baptisms.

What other hymns – the hymn doesn't have to explicitly mention baptism, just one that is flowing in your heart and singing to your soul. Go ahead, post a hymn that is in your heart today in the comment section. I can't wait to see the hymnal we all participate in making together today.

**Prayer: Still singing God, wash over us with a grace and love we need and know as You today. Amen.**

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In addition to the bowl of water, I encourage you today to have a cup of coffee or tea or OJ or a favorite beverage ready as you read the following words from Joyce Rupp:

“if I wait to be  
perfect  
before I love myself  
I will always be  
unsatisfied  
and ungrateful

if I wait until  
all the flaws, chips,  
and cracks disappear  
I will be the cup  
that stands on the shelf  
and is never used”

Baptism isn't only external event, this sacrament (which means it is a tactile/tangible way of experiencing God's grace) awakens an internal truth: you are a container of God's love. Just like the cup of coffee I hold in my hands right now, you are a vessel for God's presence in the world today. Suddenly I think, “Wait! Me? Hasn't 2020 been hard enough? Can I really do this?” Perhaps you can hear why John protested baptizing Jesus in your own responses and reactions to letting the claim of baptism control the radio station of your life.

Yet, as the psalmist sang, “Our cups runneth over,” even now this year. The good news about the vaccine. The fact that I woke up this morning with my mind, stay on Jesus. The ability to call someone and hear her voice. My family. The food I am eating. You. Especially you who are willing to read these devotionals so faithfully and offer amazing hymn suggestions! I would say even facing our problems of the pandemic, polarization, and personal ones can be a moment when God enters in. One of my favorite quotes is that struggles can either break you open or make you bitter. Sometimes it does both! Or, the truth will set you free, but first it can make you miserable. As I have learned about my own biases this year, there has been struggle. As I have tried to adapt to this new digital ministry there has been frustration. As I have sought to be open to God, there are moments my soul has cried out. Yet. Yet, God's grace has brought me safe this far. The flaws, chips, cracks, and stains of this year on the cup of my life can also be a way God enters in.

How might that be true for you?

**Prayer: God pour out Your love soaking and saturating my life every day. Amen.**

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Now hear these words from Matthew:

The moment Jesus came up out of the baptismal waters, the skies opened up and he saw God's Spirit—it looked like a dove—descending and landing on him. And along with the Spirit, a voice: "This is my Son, chosen and marked by my love, delight of my life." Matthew 3:16-17, The Message

I wonder how Jesus made sense of this holy moment? Did he think he had lost it because he was hearing voices and seeing things? Did he say, "Must be a bit of water in my ears and eyes, because this doesn't make sense!?" Did his heart feel strangely warm and his soul surge?

How would you feel? What would you think?

Because God is claiming you. God is calling you, the delight of God's life, to let your light shine especially in this year. You can let your light shine by calling someone you know who lives alone and might need to hear a loving voice. You can flood a nursing home with cards for every resident knowing that the isolation and loneliness of this year are real. You can compose a song to sing because we need music right now. You can care for creation and work to make sure our great grandchildren will have a safe place to live. You can...fill in the blank with what causes your heart to surge and soar.

God claims us and that truth changes everything, rearranges the mental furniture and sings to our soul.

Hold this truth. Dip your fingers into the water to remember again that God's baptismal love for you wasn't just confined to some moment in a sanctuary with a pastor years ago; God's baptismal love is for this day.

**Prayer: Spirit of the living God fall afresh on me.**

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As we wrap up and wind down this week of centering on baptism, I am wondering what is one truth you will carry with you? Would you be willing to share in the comment section?

What was it like each morning to baptize yourself? Did beginning the day in this way make a difference? Were there moments when you were about to say something but the evaporated water on your forehead caused you to pause and prayerfully ponder another way to express what was in your heart? Were there moments each morning when you looked back at the past day to see places where God's love was let loose and times you held back?

I ask all of this, not out of guilt, but from a place of grace. God, who sees the foibles and faults of the cups of our lives not as flaws, but as part of who we are, created in God's image. I say this because I often learn best by doing it wrong before I get it right, not that I am proud to admit it. I say this because we need to let God's light saturate our full lives, not just the lives we share on Facebook. So, take time today, to prayerfully ponder this past week. I pray that as you do the cup of your life will overflow with God's love.

**Prayer: Take my life and let it be, caught up with You in unity. Take this moment and this day, let me rest in You to stay. Amen.**