

I was walking on Channel Ridge a few days ago and met another person whose dog actually likes my high-energy, Party Girl, poodle. So we stood and watched and waited while the dogs burned off some energy chasing and wrestling with each other. As we watched them, we talked about this and that. She told me the only way she can keep spiritual equilibrium these days is by avoiding the news, not turning on the TV, not listening to current events programmes on the radio... I listened to her and wondered - is that the way to go? Are we called into the waters of baptism to free ourselves of all the darkness of the world? So we don't have to deal with it? There's certainly enough darkness to intimidate the bravest and brightest of us.

In his blog *The Waking Dreamer*, bible scholar Alan Brehm ponders how, *"There are places in our world that are so dark that most of us really don't want to look at them. Nations where law and order have so broken down that people's lives are in danger just because they belong to the wrong faith or the wrong political party or the wrong tribe."* And we could add to that - or simply because they are women, or lesbian or gay! Brehm goes on, pointing out how there are *"Cities where the government is so corrupt that money that should provide basic services for those who need them instead line the pockets of the rich and powerful. Neighborhoods where crime is so rampant that even murder becomes just another part of life. We can see all these dark places in our world just by turning on our TVs and watching the evening news. Many of us have stopped doing that because it's too disturbing, because the darkness in our world is too close."* My dog-walking friend would know exactly what he's talking about. Maybe you would too?

This morning we re-lived our baptisms as we recited the words of the baptismal covenant and once again felt the water landing on our foreheads. As one contemporary theologian puts it:

"Christian Baptism simulates death, going down into the water to drown, to die, to enter the underworld, or the Unconscious. Bursting up out of the water represents birth, from the semi-darkness and muted sounds of the water-filled womb, to the harsh (at first) brightness of new life, the struggle to breathe air, to live in a completely new medium. "

So do we re-enter the world only so we can savour the beauty and wonder of God's creation? Or are we to live love into the world as best we can? I'm pretty sure that's what Jesus wants us to do. It's laid out for us in the words from Isaiah:

*I am the Lord, I have called you in righteousness,
I have taken you by the hand and kept you;
I have given you as a covenant to the people,
a light to the nations, to open the eyes that are blind,
to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon,
from the prison those who sit in darkness.*

This is the kind of justice God is craving for the earth, for all we who live here. This is the justice God wants for those to whom God has given breath and spirit. And yet, if we are too overwhelmed by the darkness a kind of paralysis takes over and we find ourselves incapable of being an agent of God's love in the world. What to do? I think we can ponder in our hearts what it means that God became human... what it means that we, along with Jesus, are baptized into new life...

One thing it means is captured in our reading from Matthew "All right!" God tells us. "HERE HE IS. I've given my incarnation to you humans. I've given my God-self to be with people and all of creation. I've taken on human form so that we - you and I - may become close." That's what God wants - to be close to you. Close your eyes for a moment and breathe into that reality - God wants an intimate relationship with you. And here comes Jesus to show you what that can look like. Here comes Jesus to invite you and I, every single one of us into holy relationship. Here comes Jesus to show us how such a relationship will compel us into God's justice. As Brehm writes, God's way *"is the very opposite of the way we think authorities ought to 'establish justice' in our world. [We believe the authorities are to act on our behalf], they are to 'crack down' on criminals, without lifting a finger to do anything about the social conditions that create criminals. We want them to carry out the 'war on drugs,' but I'm not sure that includes coming up with ways to help those who use illegal drugs to find peace of mind. And when anyone anywhere does violence to us or to our people, we believe that we have a right and obligation to respond to that violence with violence-- whether that means waging war or executing violent offenders."*

BUT... as we know all too well - this kind of justice only expands and feeds the darkness in the world. We do know that. So each week we come together here to listen to God's word so we can be reminded what God wants from us - intimacy. And so we can be reminded what God wants us to do - live humbly and do justice. We come together to sing music and say prayers so we can remember we're not alone. And we receive communion, spiritual food for the journey, to nourish us and give us strength, and to restore our hope.

And then we go out from here, re-confirmed in that most foolish of beliefs - that we *can* change the world. That we *can* bring light into the darkness. That **we** can heal the broken and lonely places. We go out re-confirmed in God's love and light, restored as bearers of God's justice. Thanks be to God.

Amen.