

From the beginning when God's spirit moved across the water **powerful things have happened**. From that first moment of creation through Noah, the Red Sea, the waters at Mirabah to the crossing of the Jordan River into the promised land and a wedding at Cana, water is present everywhere in God's story, bringing about new life even when it means the destruction of old systems.

This includes the water of baptism – a water of repentance, commitment, renewal, mystery and miracle. As Jesus stands in the water, God's spirit descends, then God introduces him to his people and invites them to seek a righteous path of life in harmony with the Creator, in obedience to a higher authority.

Today Jesus steps down into the water of the Jordan, and he does it in solidarity with his people, who were born into a hostile world, marking a new chapter in the story of Israel. Jesus's work never separated him from his identity as God's Beloved and it never separated him from his identity as one among God's beloved people.

He was made for this life: one of promises, longings, loss, disaster, a life of dreams and relationships. He walked with his people and they would journey together through the wildness that was to come, the chaos of an imperfect creation, of nations rising up against nations, of individuals at war with themselves. Jesus joined them in strange and dangerous times.

John the Baptist cries out in the wilderness and Jesus steps down into the waters of the Jordan to begin his work.

But where are we in this familiar drama? What are we to learn?

Even though we're baptized, it is hard to see ourselves in this ancient story

- as an integral piece in God's jigsaw puzzle of history,
- named and marked as a part of God's beloved people, and
- grafted onto God's foundational promise to Israel.

It's hard to comprehend our place, to accept our identity joined not only to Christ but to each other. Through baptism we are now known far and

wide as members of God's beloved people, people who are truly and deeply loved.

John the Baptist did not cry out just to make a fuss but to call us back to ourselves and to shape our future.

John's cries call us to exercise our too long dormant spiritual muscles, to **become aware again of who we are and whose we are, to sharpen our hearing and focus our eyesight.** This is not some feeble voice whining in the wasteland about his own discomfort, but a **powerful voice crying out from the wilderness to call us back to lives of obedience to a powerful God who can free captives, lift the poor, right wrongs and heal the suffering.**

We hear this voice today. It's the voice of women in Afghanistan who will soon be locked behind closed doors for the sole purpose of breeding the next generation.

It's the voice of People of Color in white dominated societies where the tools of power – the police, the military, even the government are held by one race and people of color are not safe.

It's the voice of God's creation crying out from water polluted with plastic and air polluted with coal and land polluted with chemicals.

We picture our baptism as a joyous ritual in a sacred space, but it was in fact, water splashed at the edge of the wilderness where there is suffering, chaos, temptation, and isolation. In the waters we were called to be a part of the whole people of God. **We were not baptized into the Lutheran Church or the Baptist Church. We were baptized into Christ to become a part of the whole people of God: to be God's holy people.**

The sacrament of baptism is a ticket to places you thought you'd never go, to strange and dangerous foreign locations, responding to cries for justice, mercy and relief as an emissary of the living God.

And we go there to plant seeds of hope and healing and life – to be light in the darkness and water in a dry and parched land. Perhaps,

even, to raise your voice with theirs to cry out to God and to rally God's people to their work.

You will be uncomfortable, awkward, unsure just as I am. There will always be obstacles in the way of God's plan. John the Baptist wanted to prevent Jesus from receiving baptism; Peter wanted to stand in the way of the cross. All along the way Jesus encountered the wrong people, at the wrong time, who weren't worthy and asked for too much.

We often want to shake off the water of our baptism, reject its call to obedience and ignore that voice crying in the wilderness- all because **we** find the people unworthy and strange, the time is inconvenient and they follow the rules we think are very important.

We forget that we are the church. We are the baptized people of God. We are the Beloved ones whom God calls to be a part of a new creation powered by mercy, forgiveness and love.

So Luther admonishes us all to remember our baptism every day. To touch the water and feel the call to hope and life right on our skin. To screw up our courage and touch the life of even one person who is crying out to be loved, to belong, to be heard and seen, and to invite them to know this powerful God who is changing everything.

We are the baptized children of God. Let us live lives worthy of the gift we have received.