December 14, 2014

John 1:6-8, 19-28

Let Heaven and Nature Sing: Water

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John 1:6-8, 19-28 (New Revised Standard Version)

There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light.

This is the testimony given by John when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, “Who are you?” He confessed and did not deny it, but confessed, “I am not the Messiah.” And they asked him, “What then? Are you Elijah?” He said, “I am not.” “Are you the prophet?” He answered, “No.” Then they said to him, “Who are you? Let us have an answer for those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?” He said, “I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, ‘Make straight the way of the Lord,’” as the prophet Isaiah said. Now they had been sent from the Pharisees. They asked him, “Why then are you baptizing if you are neither the Messiah, nor Elijah, nor the prophet?” John answered them, “I baptize with water. Among you stands one whom you do not know, the one who is coming after me; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandal.” This took place in Bethany across the Jordan where John was baptizing.

My faith is important to me. It is important for me to be here, with you, in church. Today is a day for us to name and share why our faith is important to us. Can you imagine sharing with your friends, family, co-workers, and neighbors why your faith is important to you? Not in a pushy, in-your-face kind of way, but rather in the sane, honest, even casual way we’d share other things that are important to us. We share about our favorite sports team or political candidates or our views on a current issue. We should be able to share about why our faith is important to us.

In John’s Gospel, John the Baptist points, testifies, and witnesses to Jesus coming with his words and in his actions. We are all called to point to Jesus. John the Baptist pointed to Jesus in a way that we still remember. Christmas is important to me because it means that God becoming one of us means that God is with me and understands me when I feel alone, when I feel depressed, when I feel like I want to give up, when I feel like life is hopeless.

My faith means that I am never alone. My faith means that it is not just me. God is always there. My faith has provided me with a family, you, my brothers and sisters in Christ. And I am so thankful for you. I love to be alone; I really do like quiet. But, just as God is in relationship in God the Creator, God’s Son Jesus, and the Holy Spirit, I feel like I am meant to be in relationship with God and with you. My faith is not a solitary one. You help me to believe, you help me to be reminded that God is here with me. You help me to have faith.

But, sometimes I think I don’t need God. Sometimes I think I don’t need you. Sometimes I think that I am just going to give up because having faith is too hard. Being a part of a church family is hard. I remember the last year I went home for Christmas Eve worship. I was in seminary and I realized that it was the last Christmas Eve that I was not going to be working in a church. So, I went to my mom’s house and went to Christmas Eve worship at my mom’s church. They had the Christmas Eve candles in clear plastic cups and during the pastor’s sermon someone dropped their cup. And then another person dropped their cup. Then another person. And then the pastor lost it. I remember him saying, “Stop it! Stop doing that!” And everyone sort of looked around and then the pastor finished the sermon. But he had already lost it. Being a part of a church family is hard. And having faith is hard.

I love water, always have. I love to go swimming and I love waterfalls. And when I take a shower in the mornings as the water washes over my face I imagine Jesus’ face as he came out of the river Jordan at his baptism. And the dove descending and the voice calling out, “This is my Son, my beloved, with whom I am well pleased.” And I imagine God saying that to me, “This is my daughter, my beloved, with whom I am well pleased.” And every day is a new day, every day I am a new creation in Christ. Every day I can begin again. And my shower reminds me of the waters of my baptism, I am reminded that God has me in God’s hands and that God is not going to let me go.

One of my favorite Christmas carols is “O Little Town of Bethlehem”. “O Little Town of Bethlehem, how still we see thee lie. Above the deep and dreamless sleep, the silent stars go by. Yet in the dark streets shineth, the everlasting light. The hopes and fears of all the years are met in thee tonight.” You might feel like you are in that dark street right now. And I hope that you feel the everlasting light that is shining in your life. You only have to turn your head and see that God is here with you in that darkness. Today, as we think about God claiming us in our baptism, as we think about our faith and as we think about God being with us in our fear, in our doubt, in our hopelessness, in our anxiety, in our pain, in our hurt, and in our loss, I want us to do an activity. The ushers are going to pass out some paper to each one of you. Now, this is special paper. It is disappearing paper! It disappears in water. And I invite you to write a fear on your paper and hold your hope in your heart. And then bring your paper to the bowls of water as we sing “O Little Town of Bethlehem.” “Yet in the dark streets shineth, the everlasting light. The hopes and fears of all the years are met in thee tonight.” Emmanuel, God with us, come to us. We are ready, we are waiting.