

01/13/19 - Epiphany 1 - Jesus's Baptism
The Winnowing Fork of the Lit-Up Soul
Luke 3:15-22; Isaiah 43:1-7

Today is the celebration of Jesus' baptism.

Take a moment and either remember your own baptism or remember a baptism you have seen, especially if you were baptised as an infant.

Let's talk about a sacramental view of life.

Talk about Quakers.

Every moment is a baptism of the Holy Spirit. Every meal is the Lord's Supper.

It is a good idea, but...

We are human.

We forget.

And this perspective spiritualizes everything.

When we do that, we do so at the expense of the physical, created world, at the expense of our own bodies, no matter their present state.

Why I like the physical sacraments - Baptism and the Lord's Supper:

Let me answer by giving you a new definition of church:

God does not need churches or temples or synagogues.

We do.

Why?

Because churches are containers for transport devices, like a landing pad or a launch pad.

They are places to receive.

What do we receive? The gifts of God.

God gives us gifts so that we may live out those gifts *in our physical bodies in this physical world.*

We think of church as a place to get somewhere, as a place to spiritualize ourselves out of this world.

But it is exactly the opposite:

Church is where we receive the powers and gifts of God to enact them in this body, in this world.

Why?

I don't know.

I don't know the answer to that.

But I do know these are the gifts and the powers we are given.

We walk the earth given to us by God in order to live out the gifts of God.

This is why Paul says

“Your body is a temple”.

Yeah, it is, because we *receive the eternal, here, now, in this body, in this world.*

Don't think this is easy, though.

Baptism is violent.

Talk about traditional ways of baptism.

At midnight. Into cold water. Held down until you begin to struggle.

Confronting death.

The act of baptism separates things, makes us holy,
and baptism separates things we've been devoted to from things that we should be devoted to,
separates things that lead us toward God and things that don't.

The Lord's Supper is a deeply intimate physical act.

Outside of the church, it is creepy.

The criticism in Rome at the rise of Christianity was

“They eat their God”.

Yeah, yeah we do.

If it seems weird, wild, and totally bizarre to call a piece of bread the Body of Christ, and grape juice the Blood of Christ,
that is because it is weird, wild and bizarre.

But remember the words of Jesus about John the Baptist to the crowds from a couple weeks ago.

“What did you come out here to see? What did you think would happen?”

To take in the gifts of God into this physical being is to gain
the strength to die in order to have life,
to be reborn in order to die again and rise up with Christ,
coming closer and closer to the resurrection we all will share with Him.

This is why the image of the winnowing fork is so powerful.

A sacramental view of life can't comfortable because it means that in order to keep the
light of the soul present in the world,

you have to continually winnow away pressures from within and without that will
put out the shimmering light of God within us.

Talk about the violence of winnowing.

Stabbing, throwing, hitting, over and over.

We become devoted to the chaff -

being right,

being strong,

being the best.

We put other people through a lot in order to not get shaken out to our true selves.

This is what Jesus means in **John 15:1-8** -

you are the branches and I am the vine

Whatever is not serving the vine is cut away and burned up.

We like our branches.

And it hurts to be separated from them.

A winnowing fork is designed to continually separate the chaff from the wheat on the threshing floor, and it is a violent act.

It's not gentle.

The idea that baptism and the Lord's Supper is a ritual that we go through to make us feel good, where we dress in white, and treating baptism as a one time event, or come to the table as some ritual we simply repeat every month or so -

the idea of the winnowing fork puts all that to the side.

Because what John the Baptist is telling us is that:

A sacramental view of life, which comes from our baptism and sharing communion, means we know we have received the spiritual gifts of God in our physical bodies in this world, and that is a winnowing fork for all the things going forward.

A continual, awakening reminder, a sometimes violent action,

that that shakes out what keeps us from knowing we are citizens of at least two realms but probably more.

When we allow the winnowing fork of the Lord to separate, shake, and claim us, we discern the things of God in the world.

We begin to see that vast, ancient, powerful things are being given us so that we can be the truly magnificent beings we are intended to be.

If it sounds scary, it is.

It is supposed to be.

Churches were never meant to be safe spaces for our souls.

They are gateways, holders of devices that we call sacraments which are meant to be the receiving ground for the gifts of God meant for you and for me.

Why do people in church seem like cheerful, brainless tourists on a packaged tour of the Absolute? . . .

Does anyone have the foggiest idea what sort of power we blithely invoke?

Or, as I suspect, does no one believe a word of it?

The churches are children playing on the floor with their chemistry sets, mixing up a batch of TNT to kill a Sunday morning.

It is madness to wear ladies' straw hats and velvet hats to church; we should all be wearing crash helmets.

Ushers should issue life preservers and signal flares; they should lash us to our pews.

For the sleeping god may wake someday and take offense, or the waking god may draw us to where we can never return."

— Annie Dillard in Teaching a Stone to Talk: Expeditions and Encounters, (New York: Harper & Row, 1982)

If it sounds scary, trust **Isaiah 43:1-7**, the waters will not consume you and the fire will not destroy you.

Take the sacraments, the gifts of God, into your worlds, O creature of the Most High and Powerful God.

Amen.