

## You're All Wet

Matthew 3:1-12

We continue our Advent journey this morning with Matthew's dark account of the costs of walking in the spirit of Peace. After reminding his listeners that pedigree is not the standard of righteous living and that everyone has skeletons in their closets and their ancestry line, he reminds them where we come from is only one piece in the puzzle of our lives. Unlike Luke's version of the ancestors of Jesus, Matthew includes four women who were known for their colorful lives as well as other descendants that didn't exactly fit the common assumption of outstanding citizens. I love what Matthew does here because it takes the whole experience of Jesus' life and heritage and shows that God can use what others would discard to become the building blocks for creating something amazing.

John's ministry is from the wilderness – from the edges. He doesn't fit the image of the usual holy man of his day. He wore smelly clothes and ate strange food. He was loud and pushy and didn't mind calling a spade a spade, whether you were a regular person or the leader of the nation.

He calls people to repentance. Unfortunately when we hear that word too often our minds conjure up some screaming fundamentalist with a bad suit waving a Bible. The similarity to John ends at the loud boisterous behavior. John's message was a plea to be willing to let go of the old absolutes – like ancestry, prestige, power, money, class – and instead trust God's grace to lead us to a place of Peace.

It was counterintuitive. How would going out to a muddy stream and being immersed in its dirty water make one clean? How could letting go of the things that had always been the centers of value for upwardly mobile people lead to a spirit of Peace? How could they put their hope in building something that was hard to wrap their heads around and for which they didn't have all the answers? It doesn't all make sense.

To repent is to let go – let go of our need to control, let go of our need to make things happen the way we want them to happen, let go of the

passions that lead us to destruction, let go of our need for vengeance, let go of our self-centered priorities and instead follow God into a spirit of Peace. There's something counterintuitive about that, isn't there? We like being masters of our own destinies, holding our human wants as goals, taking "mine" now and worrying about others later. John calls us to let go and let the water envelop us. This was an old message. It was told by Isaiah when the people of Israel were facing overwhelming devastation. It is the same message of hope that anyone experiencing a wilderness moment in life needs to hear. When you can't rely on your own resources, let go and trust the spirit of Peace.

This past Wednesday I was invited to preach at the World AIDS Day service at Cathedral of Hope in Dallas, the church where I served before coming to All God's Children. It also happened to be the congregation that surrounded me and loved during the time I found out that I was HIV+ 13 years ago. It was great to be back among that community and remember all that had transpired. While I was pastor there, we faced some difficult moments. We buried over 1,000 people who died from AIDS from our congregation alone. It was so different during those early years of HIV. I pray that the next generation won't forget the lessons we learned about the value of community and care, demanding services and respect. We who survived have lost countless friends and family. We remember them and we remember who we are.

Baptism calls us back to our core – the center of our faith. John preached a baptism that helped the people of his day turn from meaningless assumptions to a renewed sense of purpose. They had placed their trust in the wrong things and people. They needed to learn that God was calling them to build a community that included the edges, held close the vulnerable and made room for the different. It is a long journey of faith to discover these things about ourselves. The scales fall from our eyes so reluctantly. We assume the common wisdom is both common and wise. If that were true we would still have segregation and no women's suffrage. Inter-racial marriage would be illegal. Those were the ideals of the common wisdom of their day. The announcement this week that the military recommends a change in the Don't Ask, Don't Tell policy is a remarkable sign of repentance – letting go of old prejudices and a new

direction back to the core of honor and integrity among our military personnel. The common wisdom of those in political power who resist this change will persist but the power of God's unrelenting spirit of Peace calls Christians to remember our baptism. Baptism calls us back to that which we all share in common – a reliance on the grace of God and a need for a trusted community that values the gifts each of us brings to this world.

So today, as we journey towards Bethlehem, as we face the challenges that 2011 will bring, as we work to make All God's Children a healthy and vital faith community, as we face the demons of our own doubts and fears, we remember our baptism. We have been washed with water that never dries. We are part of a community of faith that is creating hope and creating change. Those are never easy goals to accomplish. Because of our baptism, we never have to fear the threats of tomorrow. For with God, all things are possible.

Sources:

[www.homileticsonline.com](http://www.homileticsonline.com) Waters of Narnia, December 2010.