

## **Drowned in Human Brokenness**

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Matthew 3: 13-17

Poet James Autry in a poem entitled “New Birth” about the birth of his son, after acknowledging the fears and loss and grief with which he, like most of us, live day to day, and the “demons lurking around everthing” he does concludes the poem with these words:

Later I wonder how these years have come  
from pain to death to pain to life  
to what next?  
A baby babbling in the backpack,  
a mother walking her healthy pace,  
a dog trailing behind,  
and me holding on,  
through the neighborhood, through everything,  
with each day  
one by one  
coming out all right.

And that’s kind of where Christian faith lives, isn’t it? Wondering through pain and death and pain and new life...holding on, marveling when somehow the days come out all right. That’s where faith lives. It’s where it has to live, because so much in our world and in our lives doesn’t come out right. Or, at least it doesn’t come out the way we’d wish it at the time, or the way we’d hoped for. It would be so much better if God would just take care of our demons once and for all, wash us clean, wash our world clean in one fell powerful swoope and be done with it! Or, so we are tempted to believe.

When Jesus comes from Galilee to be baptized by John , John protests! And, as Matthew would tell the story, John protests because John knew who Jesus was, or at least who he wanted him to be. The Messiah! And in John’s mind, that meant he was the One to come and save the world and deal with its demons and injustice in one fell powerful swoope! And John in his preaching always said his baptism was for repentance! He felt like things had gotten so bad that even Jews needed to be cleansed of sin, just like Gentiles, and make a new beginning, so that God’s Kingdom could finally come. So, it just didn’t compute for John.

How can the One come to finally bring the Kingdom in one fell powerful swoope need repentance?! I need to be baptized by you, cries John!  
But Jesus says, “no, just do it.” In this way, God’s work to set things right in the world is coming together. In this way God’s way would not be one fell powerful swoope. God’s way would be through relationships of faith and hope and love, and those are only possible in the context of freedom. God’s way in Jesus would be the way of identification with the brokenness of human life. That’s why Jesus comes for baptism. God is saying, “ I choose to be weak...to be immersed in human brokenness”.

And so, the work of God in Jesus would remain an open question, even as we know, for John the Baptist himself, who later when he was in prison sent his disciples to Jesus because he was confused as to whether Jesus was the Messiah or not. Well, it’s an open question still. In a world like ours, do we choose to believe that Jesus reveals a God present in brokenness, or not? Because, there’s plenty of room for protest. And we do protest still, when God seems absent or impotent. Certainly seeing all those images of the suffering and devastation caused by the tsunami can lead us to say, “Where is God?” What happens when we’re drowned in human brokenness?! What happens when grief overwhelms us, or when bad things happen that we just cannot explain or understand? What happens

when the voices in our head, or in our past, drowns out everything else, saying: “If you want to be loved, you had better prove that you’re worth loving!”

Sometimes, God doesn’t seem present. There’s room for protest from us. Like John the Baptist, we are tempted to think that things would just be so much better if God just acted like the All-Powerful, and set things “right” once and for all! Friends, listen to the meaning of Jesus’ baptism as Matthew says Jesus experienced it. As he came up out of the waters, the heavens were opened to him and the Spirit of God bathed over him and the voice he heard said, “You are my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.” That’s it. Immersed, drowned! in human brokenness, God names and claims Jesus, right there, as beloved!

In Jesus’ baptism, Jesus is not repenting from sin, he is identifying with us in our human brokenness, saying because of God’s love, a new start is always possible for you, just take it! You see, Jesus’ baptism prefigures, and embodies the meaning of our own baptisms. We are baptized into him, into his life’s meaning, into his body in the world, into the meaning of his baptism. And that meaning is: even though you and I are immersed, sometimes drowned in our human brokenness, God names and claims us as beloved!

Henri Nouwen once said that the Christian spiritual life is living as people who know themselves beloved. Nouwen spent the last years of his life living as a member of, and ministering to a community of people with mental disabilities. Many of the people that he lived with hear voices that tell them that they are no good, that they are a problem, that they are a burden, that they are a failure. But said Nouwen, “the spiritual life is a life in which you gradually learn to listen to a voice that says something else, that says, “You are my beloved son...you are my beloved daughter, with whom I am well pleased.” “You are my beloved, with whom I am well pleased.”

Jesus heard that voice. When he came up out of the Jordan river he heard that voice. And throughout his earthly life he heard and followed that voice. And that’s the voice that I want to hear, and it’s the voice that you and all everywhere need to hear. The voice that says, “You are my beloved...I hold you. You belong to me, and I belong to you.” “You are safe where I am, and I am everywhere.” “Don’t be afraid. Trust that you are beloved. That is who you truly are.” That’s the voice we need to hear, isn’t it? It’s not a very loud voice because it is an intimate voice. It’s the still, small voice identified by Elijah, that comes from deep within. But, that’s what we mean, when every time we have a baptism we remind everyone to “Remember your baptism and be thankful.” It means each and every day we need to remember to listen for that voice, and claim it for ourselves because it speaks the truth! It speaks our truth. It tells us who we are, one and all, beloved children of God.

Beloved!!

What happens when we’re drowned in human brokenness? We remember our baptism! We remember that truth of God’s delight in us, even immersed in brokenness, as the foundational truth about life! And that’s how it works that we become part of his life and his body in the world. Because it’s only in really knowing ourselves and blessed and beloved that we can know everyone as beloved, and bless others. We are set free in that knowledge! We don’t have to fear our own, or others’ brokenness. In Jesus we’ve already been immersed; we’ve already been drowned in human brokenness and raised up even so to new lives of love and service. Here is our faith: when the tsunami left 150,000 people dead, and 5 million homeless, and all of humanity wonders, “where is God”? By Jesus’ immersion in baptism we believe God is present in that death and brokenness. And as those who have been baptised into Jesus’ baptism, we know there’s nothing to fear; nothing will change God’s love for us, so that we can be those, along with our Lord, willing to be submerged with everything human.

There, we become the hands, feet, and voice of God so that all humanity might see healing and hope, and be brought out of death into new life. Remember your baptism and be thankful. Know yourself as loved and valuable and worthy and it will set you free!

Amen.