



daileystory@gmail.com  
**The Baptism of Christ**  
**First Sunday after Epiphany**  
**First Sunday in Ordinary Time**  
**Year C**



**Lectionary Readings:**

Isaiah 43:1-7  
 Psalm 29  
 Acts 8:14-17  
*Luke 3:15-17, 21-22*

Imagine that someone who's fond of you reaches out to give you a seed. As you receive this gift, you notice it is unlike any you have previously planted. You have no idea how the growth will look or what the plant might produce once the seed sprouts and develops. The length of the seed's germination is also unknown. Quite some time will pass before you discover the hidden energy it contains. The only certainty you have is that a fertile source of fresh life resides within the heart of that seemingly inert object. You relax with assured confidence, trusting that the seed's qualities will eventually be revealed if you care for it with faithfulness.

Like that gift of a seed, the new year is placed in our hands. It beckons us to approach the unknown future with a spirit disposed for growth, to release preconceived notions of how the year ought to look or what it is supposed to produce. So much of future transformation will depend on care-fully tending this life, and keeping a hope-filled outlook. We are no more able to force a desired, specific change than we are to hurry a seed forth from the ground. Like Mary of Nazareth who "kept all these things, reflecting on them in her heart," the new year insists on our mindfully receiving its unfolding, with trust that there will be growth aplenty there for us.

**The Seed of a New Year From my friend Sheri-**

Seed of Restoration, reach into the layers of my past year. Bring into view the positive gifts that I missed due to clouded expectations and unwanted experiences. Soften the inner places that have been hardened by hurt. Warm the cold ground of dormant hope.

Seed of Curiosity, widen my vision of how life is to be received. Keep me open to what the hidden confines of my soul have yet to reveal. Nudge me to be inquisitive, to be ready for the surprises that awaken the wisdom waiting within me.

Seed of Insight, expand my ideas and thoughts so the lessons of your love keep influencing the way I think and act. Visit me with unexpected turns of understanding and perception. Urge me to be transformed into an ever more gracious and caring person.

Seed of Equanimity, disperse anxious remnants of fear and concern. Strengthen me to free them from my tight grasp. Like a seed planted in the soil, encourage my surrender into your abiding presence. When I wait with uncertainty, draw your enduring tranquility into my heart.

Seed of Happiness, enter the gray spaces in which I lose sight of joy. Awaken enthusiasm. Loosen whatever restrains my spirit from life-giving energy. Release gloom when it wraps around me. Let it slide off like the shell of a seed giving way to a greening shoot.

Seed of Unity, touch my heart to the suffering of others through each kind thought and caring deed. Let compassion spread like droplets of rain seeping into the soil of humanity. Thank you for your life resonating in the heartbeat of our co-existence on planet Earth. May there be peace. For what its worth Venus, planet of love, is now visible in the sky. Mars, planet of war is less visible. Amen, to that, perhaps we will all show more love.

20+C+M+B+19  
 20+T+T+T+19

Early in Year C's consideration of the Gospel of Luke we are pitched into a deeply political world of Emperors and vassals, of intrigue and borders and the lives of those who are of marginal status. It seems that crowds are drawn to this wild bear of a man we know as John the Baptist who, in stark contrast to the managed messaging of today's politics, speaks a message designed to turn people away. (Surely we could lump the naming of the crowd as a 'brood of vipers' alongside Hillary Clinton's now legendary ill-judged 'basket of deplorables' comment in the 2016 US Presidential election.) Yet people keep coming to John. The powerful get regularly side-swiped by his oratory; Herod is called out on his dubious morals; state officials and military personnel are called to live contrary to the established patterns for their profession. And still the people come. But just as they are considering anointing him he pours on cold water. There is someone even more powerful coming and he describes him in incredibly apocalyptic imagery; fire, winnowing fork, threshing floor, burning chaff, unquenchable fire!

And this is good news! How? Is it because John, this voice in the wilderness, offers hope to those who are similarly disregarded, similarly marginalized? His preparedness to critique those in power for how they acquired it and how they wield it offers comfort to those who lack the voice or the courage to name the corruption and violence of their times. But he was not just a prophet of doom, long on analysis but markedly short on action. He urges them to get ready for the change that is coming by producing what he calls 'good fruit,' (3:8-9). Good fruit that comes not from reliance on ethnic or religious purity (3:8), nor financial exploitation (3:12) nor military might (14), not even unquestionable power (3:19-20). But the good fruit of repentance and generosity, of learning to live

with sufficient, of non-violence, of justice and kindness.

This is the unquenchable fire that will consume the dross of the world.

Who gave John the authority to baptise? The Temple? The Throne? Other powerful authorities of his day? None of these. It seems that his mission was self-proclaimed and his authority derived from the numbers of those who flocked to him in the wilderness, eager for something new to break into their lives.

And then there is Jesus, the one who presumably carries the winnowing fork of which John spoke, and the flint with which to spark the flame. He submits to baptism in this marginal territory by this marginal, authority-defying character and is thereby purified for his task. Not only that, but a strange voice names his vocation as the Son of God (a name regularly used to describe the King or the Emperor.)

This anointing though, takes place not in the fine places of the palace or religious institutions, but in a river in the desert wilderness. His authority is similarly marginal, though announced by nothing less than a voice from heaven. How astounding that in this curious setting, heaven is ripped open as if God is eager to participate. And why a dove? Well, it might be because Luke intends us to connect this to the dove in Genesis 8 which presages the promise God makes not to destroy the earth with violence ever again. And maybe it is meant to contrast with the *aquila* (or eagle) which was the standard of some of the Roman legions. A Roman legionnaire was known as an *aquilifer*, or eagle bearer. The standard was a rallying point, but it also served as a representative of all the citizens of Rome and the policies of the Empire.

But in this case it's not a terrifying noble eagle, but a humble, common-or-garden pigeon. Here now, in front of these marginalised crowds, in this marginalised place, we discern someone who is marked out to sow the seeds of a peaceful revolution, and anointed for leadership in the Peaceable Community. And we see

these people, the kindling of their lives sparked by John's message of radical newness, now to be fanned into all-consuming flames, an army more terrifying to the established order than all of Rome's legions.

Response

It is intriguing that all of this significant activity takes place in such marginal locations and such mean instruments. It is in the desert, it is with dirty river water, it is the wild man John, and yet heaven opens in this place.

Though it refers to a different Gospel story I am reminded of Seamus Heaney's poem *The Skylight*. Imagine for a moment what your community's life would be like, however mean it might seem to you today, if the lid came off and something of the extravagance of God's voice entered.

*The Skylight*

You were the one for skylights. I opposed

Cutting into the seasoned tongue-and-groove

Of pitch pine. I liked it low and closed,

Its claustrophobic, nest-up-in-the-roof

Effect. I liked the snuff-dry feeling, The perfect, trunk-lid fit of the old ceiling.

Under there, it was all hutch and hatch.

The blue slates kept the heat like midnight thatch.

But when the slates came off,

extravagant

Sky entered and held surprise wide open.

For days I felt like an inhabitant Of that house where the man sick of the palsy

Was lowered through the roof, had his sins forgiven,

Was healed, took up his bed and walked away.

Prayer

God of the marginal places, you anointed your beloved Son with the power of the Holy Spirit to be light for the nations and release for captives.

Grant that we who are born again of water and the Spirit may proclaim with our lips

the good news of his peace and show forth in our lives the victory of his justice. We make our prayer through Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God for ever and ever. Amen.

**Quote for your week...**

If you want to identify me, ask me not where I live, or what I like to eat, or how I comb my hair, but ask me what I think I am living for, in detail, and ask me what I think is keeping me from living fully the thing I want to live for. Between these two answers you can determine the identity of any person. -**Thomas Merton**

"May I live this day  
compassionate of heart, clear  
in word, gracious in  
awareness, courageous in  
thought, generous in love."

-John O'Donohue