

Baptism of Our Lord
Isaiah 43:1-7
Acts 8:14-17
Luke 3:15-17, 21-22

Revealing Our True Nature

A couple of weeks ago during lunch time, some of us were in the staff room talking and Martin Green, our Canon for Music, said something which really intrigued me and that was ever since he has been a very little boy, he always hears music. He didn't say as much but I got the feeling it's like he lives with his own personal soundtrack, which when you think about it for a musician, probably isn't very unusual.

The conversation got me to thinking about whether or not I had something like that in my life, and how it may have guided my life choices. And I knew immediately, it was, and is, my passion for words, for stories and storytelling.

I come from a long line of storytellers on my father's side so it really isn't very surprising. But truly, some of my earliest memories are of writing storybooks, and before I could write, tell stories with pictures. All I needed were some crayons, a pencil, pad of paper and I was off and running in my own world for hours.

Now of course, this doesn't mean any of it was very good. In fact when I look back on some of it, it was pretty wretched. At age 8, because I loved musicals, I thought would write one about me (a fascinating topic), and the first song I wrote, *Don't Be Modest, Brag A Little*, which I belted out on the piano to the tune of *Heart and Soul*, caused my parents to convince me in no uncertain terms that in my case, modesty really was better and musical theatre was probably not going to be the best place for my particular talents.

Nonetheless, even taking into account these occasional setbacks, it really has been my love of stories, and correspondingly, of writing, reading, and hearing about people's lives, which has influenced many of my life choices, including my major in college which was English Literature with an emphasis in writing, and then subsequent careers.

For all of us, an important part of our life journey is discovering and learning how to use our God given talents, traits, and passions, be they music, writing, healing, listening, analyzing, quilt making, or any of the innumerable

gifts bestowed upon us. These gifts inherently reveal our true natures; what makes us unique.

Look for instance at the great stories of scripture because they all involve to some degree, people coming to grips with being who and what they were created to be.

Even Jesus.

Biblical scholars are not all of one mind as to what point Jesus knew who and what he was. Luke's Gospel has him at age 12 showing unusual wisdom and insight when he escapes his parents watch and ends up in the temple talking with the rabbis. But at 12 did he really know what it meant to be God's son? Assuming we accept he was both divine and human, the human part of him was still 12.

And what could be a more 12 year old thing to do than, if not necessarily sneaking off, then at least slipping away from parental eyes without taking into account, or being very concerned with how the parents might react? Even if it is to go to the temple.

But by the time Jesus comes to John to be baptized, things have changed. He is older now and the time has come for him to grow fully into his true nature, to embark upon the work and identify he was uniquely on earth for.

And he did it, as he did so many other things, by breaking open a long standing Jewish tradition. Baptism or really ritual cleansing was the washing away of impurities that would prevent or defile temple worship, some of which could be caused by sin but not all. A person could become defiled by coming into improper contact with another considered to be impure. But the point is, it always related back to temple worship

John the Baptizer took this ritual to a new level when he proclaimed baptism was not just about being cleansed from things that occurred in the past but to be cleansed for the purpose of present and future reformation of life—repentance, turning away from sin and towards God.

But with the revelation of Jesus' true nature at his baptism, the voice of God saying from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased," baptism became more than just about repentance of life. It became an initiation rite, in which those baptized in Christ's name, now and forever would be united to God and one another by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Jesus didn't have to become baptized because of what he had done but because of what he could do afterwards, and in many ways, it remains the same for us today. It's not that what happens in our lives before baptism is immaterial, especially in the case of adults being baptized, but with baptism we enter a threshold of new life in which our true natures, as children of God, emerge in ways they never would otherwise. For some it may even seem like they have gotten a new soundtrack to their life.

Barbara Brown Taylor, an Episcopal priest and author says baptism is the: [t]urning point in each one of our lives when we were received into the household of God and charged to confess the faith of Christ crucified, proclaim his resurrection, and share in his eternal priesthood . . . Our baptisms are our ordinations, the moments we are set apart as God's people to share Christ's ministry . . . the instant we rise dripping from the waters of baptism and the sign of the cross is made upon our foreheads, we are marked as Christ's own forever.ⁱ

This morning three people, Antar, Connor, and Lindy, are entering this threshold of a new life in Christ. This their time to be set apart, their ordination, and marks the beginning of their new lives of faith, in which as they mature in that life, by the grace of God, they will grow into their God-given traits, talents, and passions.

And while none of us here can promise them their spiritual path will always be clear from this point forward, there probably will be a few setbacks along the way, we can say with conviction they are not in this alone because through baptism, we are forever bound to the One who created and loves us more than we can ever fathom, as well as to each other.

But while this is a time to celebrate our newest members, it is also a unique time for reflection for the rest of us because it is a time of new life for us as well. A time for all of us to think and pray deeply about how we have used the traits, talents, and passions given us and how we may do so in the future. Ultimately, it is a time for us to renew our commitment in the sharing Christ's eternal priesthood and never, never be modest about it.

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ⁱ Barbara Brown Taylor, *The Preaching Life* (Cowley Publications: Cambridge, 1993), pp. 29-30.