

The Baptism of Our Lord – January 10, 2021
Genesis 1:1-5; Psalm 29; Mark 1:4-11
Epiphany, Winnipeg

I wonder if God knew what was going to happen. In the beginning when God was starting to make the world there *was something there* for God to work with already – there was water, deep deep water, and unformed matter, and it flowed and rocked and waved back and forth. No one could see how it all fit together, but it was there. And while all of that was happening God breathed over the water, in an out and God's spirit moved back and forth over the water, and God said "Let's have some light here." And then there was light, and God could see just like someday we all would see and then there was night and there was day and God thought it was so good and you can imagine God saying, "Look what I made! It's good!" And from all that water and from those depths God started making life, and one day God would look and say, "It's light, it's dark, it's wet, it's dry, it flies, it crawls, it shines in the sky, and these people....they're somehow just like me. It's good, so very good!"

But I wonder if God really knew what was going to happen. Good and faithful people will answer that and say, "Yes, God knew it, God planned it, God wrote it all down, everything that happened is just as God said it would from the beginning." But I wonder if God knew what was going to happen? Good and faithful people will answer that and say, "No, God just made it put us here and it's up to us and God is watching to see what we do." And good and faithful people will say, "I don't know what God knew or when." I wonder if God knew about viruses and politics then. I wonder if God knew about extreme wealth and extreme poverty, or about climate change or racism and arguments about masks, or that on the Feast of Epiphany in 2021 an angry crowd would storm the capitol in the U.S. to try to stop that man from becoming President and a woman of colour from being

Vice President? When God's spirit flowed out over all those depths and that water, did God have any idea how much we could hate each other and how willing we might be to hurt one another?

Maybe God knew, but God decided right from the start never to give up on us.

Or maybe God didn't know, and there have been all these terrible surprises along the way...but God has never given up on us anyway.

Either way, God keeps on breathing God's spirit over the water, because God just can't keep from raising up life when there seems only to be chaos or death.

Today we heard this story about Jesus being baptized, and it's a really short story. It's almost like Jesus doesn't have time to stick around and have a long conversation about it all, or to stay after the service for coffee and cake and well-wishes. It goes like this: "In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. And a voice came from the heavens, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased."'" And that's it. Then Jesus steps out of the water, and God's spirit that breathes over the water sends Jesus into the world, sends him out into all that life that God made.... Jesus walks into the world with its terrible chaos and its beautiful chaos, and God brings life out of the water, and God will bring life to the sick, to the outsiders, to everyone who struggles, even to the dead so that they will live.

And I wonder, the same way, if Jesus knew what was going to happen when he came up out of the water? Did he know what would happen with all these people? Did he know what would happen with us who are his followers, who could be as broken and messed up and divided from one another as anyone else could be? Did he know? Or did he just take a risk on us, sight unseen? Either way, Jesus just said something like, "I'm in this for the long haul and I won't walk away from these people." So he took on flesh as one of us, and he came up out of the water of baptism like us, and he walked right into the world like us so that we and all creation would live. It's a risk he's willing to take. And he'll stay with us. Even if it costs him his life.

I wonder if you knew what was going to happen? I'm pretty sure I didn't. Still don't. When I was born way back when, and when I was baptized at 64 days of age I didn't really have clue. When I got married at 24 and ordained at 28 and you called me to be your pastor at 53 did I really know what would happen? Have any of us really known, from the day we were born until right now? Did we know about COVID, or heartbreak, or joy, or injustice, or war or peace? When Epiphany was born 53 years ago did we know about growing and getting smaller and dividing and moving ahead and about wondering where it's all going? No. We didn't know. But we all keep stepping out of the water and into the world, even if it's risky to love, or to speak the truth, or to practice generosity, or to forgive. We keep stepping out even when COVID has made each of our worlds smaller, like Jesus stepped out of the water and took a chance on us no matter what happened; and like God breathed life out of that deep water in the beginning, and made a commitment to be with us in the wonder and the beauty and even in the worst that we could do.

We have heard this story about God's spirit breathing over the deep deep water at creation, and it's a story about a God who always brings life out of whatever is at hand, and will always give life to creation. We have heard this story about Jesus being baptized in water and stepping out of the water to be with us, with all of us, with everyone, even with those people – whoever those people might be - even if it costs him his own life. Because you know, God can always bring life out of death. And this story is our story too...for the voice from the heavens says to us, "you are my son, you are my daughter, my beloved." And we step out of the water every day into the world where that same Spirit of God, the Spirit of the risen one, is always there breathing more life. AMEN.