

“Baptismal Promises”

Matthew 28:16-20

Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. When they saw him, they worshipped him; but some doubted. And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been give to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”



What is man that you are mindful of him
the son of man that you care for him?

Psalm 8:4

“Mindfulness”, wrote Jon Kabat-Zinn in his book, ‘Wherever You Go There You Are’, is considered the heart of Buddhist meditation but its essence is universal and of deep practical benefit to all. In essence, mindfulness is about wakefulness. Mindfulness is being.” Mindfulness is being awake to the unique beauty and possibilities of each present moment as it unfolds. . . Just as a garden requires attending to if we hope to cultivate flowers, and not to have it be overrun with weeds, mindfulness also requires regular cultivating. We call the cultivating of our own mind to bring it to wakefulness---meditation. (Jon Kabat-Zinn, Ph.D. is the founder and director of the Stress Reduction Clinic at the University of Massachusetts Medical Center and Associate Professor of Medicine in the Division of Preventive and Behavioral Medicine)

There are many ways to practice wakefulness meditation. In our religious tradition we turn to scripture for regular cultivation, relying upon the Holy Spirit to enlighten our reading of it. In verse 4 of psalm 8, we find that it’s the Spirit of Inquiry that is connecting the one who is praying to God. “The Spirit of Inquiry”, wrote Jon Kabat-Zinn, “is fundamental to living mindfully. Inquiry is not just a way to solve problems. It is a way to make sure you are staying in touch with the basic mystery of life itself and of our presence here.” When noted Biblical scholars wondered about the ancient psalmist’s question: ‘What is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him?’ they commented: ‘God not only remembers and cares for humankind, but gives to the human person status, honor, dignity, and authority . . . The human person is unimpressive when compared with the sun, moon, and stars. And yet the human person is elevated by God above all creatures, and stands next to and close to God and God’s angels in dignity and authority . . . Divine sovereignty is the warrant for human dignity, which is authorized to care for the earth so that the whole earth may become its true, productive self (Texts for Preaching, p. 341).

A second scripture that we turn to with The Spirit of Inquiry in order to become mindful of another Divine Promise in Baptism is Matthew 3:16.

As soon as Jesus was baptized he went up out of the water.
At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit
of God descending like a dove and alighting on him.
And a voice from heaven said,
“this is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.

In his reflection on this verse, Rev. Samuel wrote in ‘Affirmation’: “Over the heads of her students, Morehouse holds a crown that she challenges them to grow tall enough to wear.” These words of the renowned theologian Howard Thurman have served as a clarion call to summon the best from incoming Morehouse College students for the past several decades. There is something powerful about seeing greatness in someone before that person even realizes how great they are. According to Matthew’s gospel, before Jesus performed any miracles . . . before he interceded on behalf of the weak and the afflicted . . . before he offered himself as a ransom for the sins of many . . . Jesus was affirmed by God. And the power of that affirmation prior to Jesus’ performance is precisely what guided Jesus’ performance. It’s one thing to be challenged to become something good. But the more powerful challenge is to realize the good that you are, and be inspired to realize its full capacities. Jesus taught us that realizing God’s kingdom (kindom) is all about recognizing what God has placed within us. There are crowns and crosses over each of our heads and within each of our hearts. The question is: “Will we allow ourselves to grow into the full measure of our being?” Sin is the denial and the neglect of who we are. Marianne Williamson put it this way: “Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure.” God let our baptism be the affirmation that guides our performance. Amen.

Another scripture that helped Rev. Schaper become mindful of God’s promises in Christian Baptism comes from Luke 2:22-40.

‘His parents brought Jesus up to Jerusalem
to present him to the Lord.’

My little brother’s linen and frilled baptismal robe hung in the coat closet at my house for decades. He is now past fifty. One day he called and wanted it. “I said, your children are grown, so are mine. Why?” “Because,” said he, “I want it near me.” “Why?” I said again. “I want to remember that I was presented to God and that God took me in.” “But why now?” “Because,” he said, “life has become very hard for me. My first wife and my first child are angry with me again. My second wife just hit my only son. My third wife is tired of hearing me talk about my first and second wives.” Aha. Life becomes too much for many of us, many times. At Christmas, we realize that we not only have to rely on a child for salvation (!) but also have to rely on our own childhood. It is never too late to have a happy childhood, I have quipped often. It is also never too late to remember our baptism--Baptismatus Sum---as a touchstone of all of God’s promises. We too have been presented to God. And God accepted the present of us. When life becomes too much for us, O God, let us remember whose we are, precious and beloved children of God. Amen.

Many years later as a grown man, Jesus’ disciples heard him say: “Let the children come to me, do not hinder them; for to such belongs the realm of God. I say to you, whoever does not receive the realm of God like a child shall not enter it.” After saying it, Jesus took them in his arms and blessed them, laying his hands upon them. (Mark 10:13-16, adapted) Aurora, today is your day to be wrapped securely in Jesus’ arms and to hear Him whisper in your ear: “Remember I will be with you always, to the end of the age.” Our Abba, we thank you ‘that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord’ (Romans 8:38-39 adapted) Amen.