

## January 10, 2021

I love Christmas, and I also love Epiphany. For me Epiphany is all about surprise... those aha moments, when an insight changes how you see or understand something. It's like putting together a puzzle, all those little pieces, and suddenly a bigger picture emerges, and you see something you weren't expecting...

Learning is a little like that... And learning is life long process. I've played guitar since I was a kid... And during this pandemic when I haven't been able to jam with others, I've been working on scales and arpeggios, and speed... Or shredding... I always thought it would be too hard to do. But you know what—I can play it a little bit! That's a surprise to me! You *can* teach an old dog a new trick-- or perhaps an old dog with a new guitar? Guess what I got for Christmas?

For me, Christianity has been a little like playing guitar, a lifelong process. It has been a journey filled with questions, mystery, wondering and figuring it out... *And* a lot of surprise...

Our Lectionary readings today make an interesting pairing. Our Old Testament reading is the very beginning of the bible and the priestly creation story. And our gospel reading is the baptism of Jesus. Today I'd like to do some reflecting on baptism and creation...

Quick Story... Today marks my Baptismal anniversary. I was baptized 22 years ago. A fundamental shift happened for me that day; instead of being on the outside looking in, I started imagining myself as an insider. My identity changed... And I started noticing the many ways my thoughts were really focused in God's direction.

I was farming at the time, utterly dependent on things out of my control. I found myself relating joy and gratitude when a new lamb was born, or when the barn was full of fresh hay. I also found myself relating anguish when an animal needed to be put down... Like the proverbial person on their knees... Baptism gave me a deeper appreciation for what God has made.

And it still does... A month ago, or so, I went for a walk on our property, haven't done it for a while. I followed the edges of the fields and remembered cutting hay and moving fences... I stopped at a few trees where I used to have deer stands. It was a beautiful day; the sun was shining and just a slight breeze. And during the whole walk, I felt so alive and appreciative. The whole walk felt like a little prayer.

The natural world can teach us a lot. Whether it's gazing at the stars, putting seeds in the ground, watching a storm, smelling fresh hay, or noticing a beautiful sunset. This world is amazing. And God created it. We are absolutely dependent on it, and at the same time we are absolutely blessed by it. It is a privilege to give witness to the miracle of creation that is all around us and all the time!

This creation is mysterious and amazing, and we are all trying to figure out what it means to be a creature in God's good creation... And when we do that, we become glued to God. He is a very present reality. This is all first article Christianity; from the Apostles Creed, "I believe in God, the Father almighty, *creator* of heaven and earth..."

Baptism is an event; and it's also a way of life. As we live into our baptism, we discover change, or using our Lutheran language—sanctification happens. It's a lifelong process of rising every day as a new and forgiven creation...

It's about dwelling in the word, and hearing God speak... It's about experiencing God's Love, Mercy and Forgiveness... It's about being a communion of Saints... It's about learning to love...

The big Epiphany in our Gospel reading comes directly from God... Jesus is baptized, a voice from the heaven speaks, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased." God is speaking love into the world...

We are *brought in* through Baptism, so we are *sent out* as new creation. We are *grounded* in baptism, so we are *free* to serve others. Baptism is not only for us; it is for the sake of the world... For the sake of all creation! This kingdom stuff is God's very huge and very surprising work.

Now imagine heaven opening, and hearing those words eternally spoken to you-- "You are my Child, my Beloved; with you I am well pleased." And confident of God's Love... What is God calling you to create? How are the puzzle pieces coming together for you? What picture are you seeing? How might you be surprised this year?

Amen...