

# **From the Pulpit of Trinitarian Congregational Church**

**Sunday, January 25, 2015**

**Preacher: Rev. Julie Olmsted**

**Scriptures:**

**Psalm 62: 5-12**

**Mark 1: 14-20**

**Sermon: Harnessing Joy**

After any significant event, especially if there are vows taken, soon after there is a period of testing. In our Scripture today, if we back up a little bit, we see that Jesus was baptized by John the Baptist, and that he immediately went out to the desert to be tested. Slowing down a bit, let's remember together the experience in the Jordan River. There are different scholarly theories and notions about the relationship between Jesus and John. I just finished reading a book called "Christ Actually" by James Carroll. Carroll is convinced that Jesus was a disciple of John's, and that eventually, there was a parting of ways when John was arrested, and that it would have happened anyway, given the different styles of each teacher. It is a fascinating relationship regardless of the differing theories, but today let's just stick to the facts we know: Jesus was baptized by John in the Jordan River. The sky opened up (Jesus saw the sky open up), it says in the Bible. A dove descended. And God's voice expressed God's pleasure at this occurrence. Jesus was declared God's Son, in whom God was well pleased. Was this something that everyone observed or was it a personal, highly significant spiritual experience that only Jesus had? Either way, it was a really big deal. "Immediately afterward," it says in the previous verses to our reading today, the Spirit sent Jesus out into the desert alone. He was in the desert 40 days and was there with the wild animals. While he was in the desert, he was tempted by Satan. The angels came and took care of Jesus." – Matthew 12-13.

I'm thinking it was an amazing, powerful, joyous experience, Jesus' baptism. I'm thinking that afterwards, nothing was ever the same for him; and nothing was ever the same for the world. These remarkable events shape our lives. They are events that live in our memories and move us in directions (consciously or unconsciously) that formerly we never thought ourselves capable or even aware of. Who here can remember his or her baptism...or their confirmation? How about your wedding? My baptism was certainly nothing like Jesus'. But it was a big deal. Only by looking back can I see how big of a deal it was. I was at a revival down in Fayetteville, Arkansas. My mother was with me. We traveled from our home in southern Missouri, down the windy, hairpin curves and hills of the Ozark Mountains, maybe a couple of hours. We had heard about the great restoration evangelist Jimmy Allen. We wanted to see him

and hear him. Mom had not gone to church in a long time, but she wanted to make sure I heard this well-known preacher. At one point in the service my mother rummaged through her purse. I didn't know what she was getting and I leaned over (at the tender age of 12), and whispered, "Mom, you can't smoke in here!" "I know that!" My dear mother responded.) She was getting a tissue! When it came time for the altar call, I said to her, "I've got to go." Her only response? "Go." I was immersed into the pristine waters of the baptismal font behind the pulpit. My new life as a Christ follower had begun. And there was much time in between that moment when I walked down the aisle for my baptism, joyful and trembling, full of repentance and love and commitment and not-knowing. This was a time that flowered into faith and blessing and ultimately, my own ministry. This was not a time I planned. It was not a time that could be placed on my calendar; no worldly time, but godly time, spiritual time, Kairos, the perfect time, established by God, when, as famous preacher Fred Craddock puts it, "a constellation of factors come together to create an unusually significant moment."

Some of us may like to think that Jesus' baptism was totally unnecessary. The Son of God, why would he even need to be baptized? We like to think, perhaps, that it was just a demonstration, a show of humility that serves as an example for us. I like to think that it was life altering. I like to think that, although Jesus had sinned minimally, if at all, he had yet to fully and publicly commit to the ministry for which he was called and groomed and destined; this was his moment. This was his Kairos. And it had to be breathtaking, a little scary, and filled with unspeakable joy.

Then of course, he was tempted. He was tried. He was deeply worked on, prepared and strengthened by outside forces, the victory over which forces gave him boundless inner strength from God. This experience imbued him with power from the Spirit. This experience gave him fortitude, gave him boldness, gave him a sense of godly authority, so much that he was able to walk up to anyone, even young (probably teenage) boys and say, "Drop your nets and follow me." Just imagine those moments. I have done it a thousand times. Imagine his smile. Imagine the golden sunshine. Imagine the scene that Marilyn found and put on the front of the bulletin. It was probably a busy scene. Folks were fishing from the shore, repairing their nets, preparing themselves to go out to sea. Others were perhaps shopping, traveling, selling their wares from distant lands. Maybe some were cooking over a fire; smell the aroma of olive oil and fish (maybe some garlic? Are you getting hungry?). And here comes this man Jesus. Maybe he touches you on the shoulder. Maybe he throws a pebble in the water. Maybe he whistles or gets your attention in some other way. But he has this power, this charisma, this glorious aura (I'm thinking), and he says, "Come." And you just can't help it, man. Maybe you've heard about Jesus. Maybe you were there at that baptism. Maybe you're sick of what you've been doing, you've

been dreaming, distracted, maybe somewhat restless, and you need something, you don't know what... And a voice says to you (like my mother at my baptism), "Go."

You can read the Book of Mark in one setting. You will read about the challenges, the teaching, the miracles, and the bumbling questions that the newly minted disciples ask. They are learning. They are being worked on, too. Imagine the joy, when Jesus selected the entire twelve. Imagine the looks they gave each other. "Here we are..." (Have you heard the song "Woyaya?" It's an African pop song from not too long ago. We are going, heaven know where we are going...we know we are.) They really didn't know what lay ahead. All they knew was they were being called. They were being called by this amazing, luminous, joy-filled being who said, "Come and follow me." You will be challenged. You will be tempted. You will fall then you will get back up. And you will keep going. (We will get there; heaven know how we will get there. We know we will.) And you will have joy, more than fun, more than a temporary "high"; you will have the depth of joy, coming from the Lord God on high.

Imagine the joy of those first few days together. Imagine that, coupled with the joy of Jesus' baptism. Read the stories about the gatherings, the retreats, the miracles, and the teachings. Read about the Good News that Jesus had caught, embodied, and now was ready to share with the masses, just him and his band of twelve that would change the world forever.

Here's my theory: the joy of the moment was fuel for these young men, and the men and women who followed them. Had they merely "talked among themselves," had they merely gone about their everyday lives, had they merely held the memory of meeting Jesus in a little golden box and never shared it at all, nothing would have changed. Jesus did not ask those early fishermen to "do one more thing." He did not ask them to work harder, to sacrifice joy, or to even change who they were. He merely said, "Come." He merely offered them the opportunity to walk in a different direction, and thereby to become new creatures. They could have said no. But they didn't. Aren't you glad? It was not always easy for them, and it won't always be easy for us (it may be hard; and the road may be rocky and rough. But we will get there; heaven knows we will get there. We know we will.)

You and I experienced the alchemy of joy and a new beginning last week. We had this moment established by God, this "Kairos" of moments having been gathered, collected and whipped into joy. You have been (and I have been) tempted and tried. We have been worked on and prepared. We have been empowered, by your interim time, your Associate Minister, your Search Committee and your very own dreams for the future. I assert today that Jesus is calling us to a new place in time. God has a shimmering, joy-filled, challenging and new life ahead for all of us who choose to

leave the past behind and follow.

The disciples did not let the fuel of joy simple run off into the ocean or sink into the ground. They made use of it to go places. They harnessed it to bless others, to create more joy and healing, and to open wide the doors of welcome and salvation for the sake of the beloved community, the kingdom of God. This is the opportunity we have before us here at Northfield Trinitarian Church. Arm in arm, fueled by the joy of the Lord, we set out on the journey ahead. Woyaya. Woyaya, Woyaya... Amen.