

Simply, Humbly

Isaiah 42: 1-9

Matthew 3: 13-17

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Isaiah 42: 1-9

Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights; I have put my spirit upon him; he will bring forth justice to the nations. He will not cry or lift up his voice, or make it heard in the street; a bruised reed he will not break, and a dimly burning wick he will not quench; he will faithfully bring forth justice. He will not grow faint or be crushed until he has established justice in the earth; and the coastlands wait for his teaching.

Thus says God, the Lord, who created the heavens and stretched them out, who spread out the earth and what comes from it, who gives breath to the people upon it and spirit to those who walk in it: I am the Lord, I have called you in righteousness, I have taken you by the hand and kept you; I have given you as a covenant to the people, a light to the nations, to open the eyes that are blind, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon, from the prison those who sit in darkness. I am the Lord, that is my name; my glory I give to no other, nor my praise to idols. See, the former things have come to pass, and new things I now declare; before they spring forth, I tell you of them.

Matthew 3: 13-17

Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan, to be baptized by him. John would have prevented him, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?" But Jesus answered him, "Let it be so now; for it is proper for us in this way to fulfill all righteousness." Then he consented. And when Jesus had been baptized, just as he came up from the water, suddenly the heavens were opened to him 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, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased."

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Partly inspired by the plot that was already there I was excited to plant a garden when we first moved to the parsonage. Having a garden was something I had tried unsuccessfully many years ago as my two eager and impatient preschoolers dug up our carrot patch to see what was happening underground.

Now we carefully decided just what we wanted—hoped--to grow, bought the garden tools, seeds and supplies we needed, cleared out the remnant roots and rocks of the parsonage plot, prepped the soil with fertilizer, planted cucumbers, zucchini, summer squash, green beans and tomatoes, and then carefully watched for the first signs of growth. In just two weeks we started to see the little sprouts budding through the soil. Our plans, our work, was beginning to pay off.

Over the next few months we continued to tend to the garden as more and more vegetables grew. We took care of the garden, and the garden took care of us. There was more work, time and responsibility required than we had first anticipated, but it was all worth it.

In some ways it was so simple to just be able to go out to the yard and pick dinner off of the vines, yet it was also a humbling experience at the same time. Tending a garden is a meditative, humbling experience. You cannot force anything, you just have to wait, yet every time you put seeds in the ground it feels like a proclamation of faith in the future – or at least in the next few months. It is also quite humbling and amazing to see the results of what nature herself does even when the gardener's skills are far from refined, when mistakes are made with watering or weeding.

As I read a reflection earlier this week by Presbyterian minister Mihee Kim-Kortⁱ, entitled '*The Seed Baptism Plants*,' I was fascinated by how she described the ways the story of Jesus' baptism makes her think of gardens, as it is such a unique perspective on this very familiar experience that begins Jesus' earthly ministry. She said, "Whenever I read of Jesus' baptism, I think of the moment as a kind of seed...as I seek to cultivate what the sower has scattered on my soils, which actually seem mostly rocky these days. There are patches of the other kinds, too, which makes for hard but creative work.....Really what I need is simple: the light and warmth of community, the earthy presence of the Holy Spirit, and the satisfying waters of baptism. Baptism is ongoing, as we live into the identity of already being God's beloved....I'm also grateful for the reminders that our baptism not only roots us in God but ties us together—we are both individually and collectively called God's beloved."

There are so many seeds that baptism plants in Jesus' life and in our lives from the satisfying waters of baptism.

As Jesus approached his cousin at the Jordan River, John was naturally puzzled, "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?" But Jesus answered him, "Let it be so now; for it is proper for us in this way to fulfill all righteousness." Then he consented.

This brief yet essential conversation planted the seeds of allowing the space for each of them to simply do and to be as they were called to. John the Baptist humbly planted the seeds in all who were seeking baptism to a lifestyle committed to God. Jesus humbled himself to be with those who were sinners, outcast and in need of forgiveness. The seeds of Jesus' ministry to the poor, the marginalized, the unwelcome, the hurting, the hungry, are rooted in his baptism as he identifies with those who have chosen God's way by coming to John to be baptized. He stands with them in the river, and with them throughout his life. After this day he will eat with them, tend to their needs and accept their hospitality. Together Jesus and John willingly participate in the event that leads to the confirmation and revelation of Jesus' identity.

The One born simply, humbly, in a Bethlehem stable, began the greatest gift of love and life, simply, humbly in the same river where the Israelites had long ago crossed into the Promised Land, and through the sacrament, the promises of baptism, invites us to join him as we belong to the Body of Christ. Just as Jesus came up from the water after being baptized, the Spirit of God announced from heaven, "This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased." The One God calls "*My Son*," will one day teach us to pray, "*Our Father*." The seeds of our belonging flow through the waters of baptism.

In Jesus' baptism we see how he is rooted in God, and how God is pleased with who he is, and who is loved deeply, the One, the servant, in whom God's soul takes delight. The seeds planted in Jesus' baptism are signs of faith for the future, as he is the covenant, a light to the nations, to open the eyes that are blind, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon, from the prison those who sit in darkness.

In our baptism too we are rooted into God. At first there are little signs of growth as little sprouts budding through the soil, as the promises made *for* us, made *by* us, have been planted in

our lives, to receive the freedom of new life in Christ as we are offered the nurture of the Christian church.

Throughout our lives it takes effort, time, responsibility and faith but the plans and the work of Christian discipleship pay off as by our ongoing baptismal promises we strive to follow in the way of our Savior, to resist oppression and evil, to show love and justice, to witness to the work and word of Jesus Christ as best as we are able and to grow in the Christian faith as faithful members of the church of Jesus Christ. We celebrate Christ's presence and further Christ's mission in all the world.

Baptism is a seed planted in the garden of our family and the church that requires nurturing to grow. As we reflect on Jesus' baptism, on our own baptism today, may God remind us to live into our baptismal promises, and be a community where faith is planted, watered, and nurtured. Amen.

ⁱ <https://www.christiancentury.org/blog-post/sundays-coming/seed-baptism-plants-matthew-313-17>