

There's a Dove in the sky today...



Baptism of the Christ by Daniel Bonnell

To follow on from Susan last week, as this week's correspondent from the bookshelves...I read a book a few years ago. *The Liturgy of the Ordinary* by Tish Harrison Warren. Unlike Susan's hard work with her book, I loved mine. It is gentle, simple and blessing... I really must read it again!

Today we remember Jesus' Baptism as part of our Epiphany Celebrations. 'Epiphany' means 'showing' – how the glory and the love of God shines out, revealing himself to us... and at the same time revealing us to ourselves.

One of the little gems that stuck with me, from Tish Warren's book, was how every moment is somehow a window onto the mystery and love of God. How his transforming love can touch and shine through every moment of our everyday lives. Even the very simple things.

For example, having a shower. She invites us to offer the time as a prayer, rejoicing in the Water of Creation, and remembering our baptism as the water flows over us. Remembering God's love for us, and his sparkling renewal flowing over all our hurts and bruises and aches. It might be something you want to try, it is a beautiful way to start or end the day, remembering ourselves as beloved, as claimed, as washed-ever-newly, and restored in grace, reminding us of the people God made us to be. God showing us even in that very ordinary moment, the 'grace upon grace' which he pours upon us, and his power to touch and transform the most ordinary of things.

Looking through water is often a grace: there's a clarity and yet a mystery to it that shows things newly, and yet full of the possibility for discovery. It's also true that being

near water reduces the stress hormone cortisol, restoring and renewing us from within. And that's before we start thinking about rainbows.

I must admit, though, today's feast reminds me more of a bath than a shower. You know, when you've had a hard day, and body or mind aches deeply, and you sink into the warmth of a bath and that healing reaches deep, deep, through; renewing and restoring, loosening knots of pain and hurt almost as if it works from within.

Today, at the Baptism, it is one of the traditional endings of the first part of Christmas. Today we will take down the Christmas trees, and leave only the Crib to remind us of our onward journey ever deeper into Christmastide. The outward signs of Christmas are tidied away, and we move more to the inward workings of the blessing of Christ's birth. We dive into it, as we dive into the font, immersing ourselves into it, and finding it working from within.

Today... Christmas sinks in – that kiss at the heart of Christmas, that have spoken so much of, doesn't end at this point... it's a little like when someone we love kisses us with lipstick on, and we scrub at it. "It doesn't rub off, it rubs in", we say....

As we stand today in the Jordan river with Jesus, we feel his love entering and touching all waters, the waters of birth, waters of baptism the waters we drink that give us life, the waters we wash in. The water that connects us to the cycle of creation – clouds, rains and seas, that makes us part of a whole, and reminds us of our stewardship, and our dependency. We find ourselves drawn into the love that cleanses, protects, births us ever-newly, that keeps us alive.

We are invited to plunge into Jesus. To let him soak into us – into all our hurts and pains, and work his Holy Spirit, his love, his presence, his strength all through us, from within.

Jesus descends into the river, as if he plunges into womb and grave. The waters part, like the breaking waters of new birthing, the heavens open wide as Jesus emerges... and a voice from heaven says to him, and to us, newly born ...

you are my beloved child.

(and remember it never rubs off, it only ever rubs in...)

And **then**, (!)

.....there is the Dove.

The Dove over the water - just like the dove of Genesis that came after Noah's flood to show that there would be new life, and new possibility. The Dove of Promise.

The Dove.... of the Holy Spirit telling us as one of the ancient Church Fathers put it: 'the world's universal shipwreck has ceased'¹

Reminding us that, even as the world might feel filled with evil and ready to drown in pain and despair, God shows us how to build an ark.

And revealing Jesus himself as our ark – an ark for everyone. *Come into the waters with me – together, he says, and I will build you into a family, and keep you safe, and then set you on your feet again, and help you build a new beginning.*

It's today really, that Jesus takes up his Cross – sharing with us our Lenten Cross, so he can share with us his Easter Cross. Today is when he takes the sins of the world on his shoulders. This is where he says he isn't just for the nice bits, the cosy bits, the Christmas bits- he's in it for it all. Jesus, *the Lamb without sin*, queues up for the confessional, so to speak, and makes a public act of humility and penance *that he doesn't need for himself, but only for us*. He becomes at this point our representative. What happens after this point – the whole journey to Easter - unfolds from this moment.

It reminds me of the magic disappearing ink we use at messy church – where the children write their worries and they dissolve in water. They often come back and back to write the same things over and over and watch them fade away. Jesus says, *tattoo the world's pain on the skin you share with me, and I will wash it away. Over and over again if need be.*

Baptism – bathing, showering – it all reminds us of our bodilyness, of our vulnerability, of our shared humanity - and of how Jesus shoulders it for us. And shows us through that, to take the concerns of others as our own.

'the more I believe in the incarnation, the more I care about drains' – said Fr Stewart Headlam, 19th Century Anglo-Catholic priest². He founded the Guild of S. Matthew; which linked incarnational theology with labour rights, housing reform, sanitation, and education. He led campaigns for decent housing, sanitation and public health workers' rights and warred against slum landlords.

His belief in Christmas led to his belief in transformation and possibility. Of love that brings an ending to the universal shipwreck of the world.

God anointed Jesus with the Holy Spirit and with power, revealing his Divinity for all to see. And ... through the waters of birth and baptism ... we, too, are equipped for the

¹ S. Peter Chrysologus

² Although we don't have an exact written source, it's testified to as a regular sermon theme of his by several co-temporary writers.

journey, named. Anointed. Jesus receives the Spirit not for himself, for the Spirit is his, and always has been, ... but because as a human he holds and joins the whole creation in himself – so what is poured upon him, is poured upon us too, through him.

You are my Beloved.

The words we share with Jesus. God's very own.

Build an ark?? we might say, faced by the stories we carry... '*Ridiculous!*'

– well, Let's build one anyway.

Let's dive in with Jesus....

Feel that warmth somehow healing and renewing us from within

Because Jesus is standing in the mud of the river – in the pain and the aches - with us...

.... The birthwaters are breaking for sure ... and ...

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