

## New Every Morning

January 7, 2007

Baptism of Jesus

Are you a “morning person?”

One of those people whose eyes pop open and feet hit the floor,  
eager to embrace the day with energy and enthusiasm?

If you are, bless you!

I need to confess that I’m not a natural morning person.

Usually I need the alarm clock to rouse me

and I am up and about because my daughter needs to catch a school bus

and there are many things to do each morning.

I had a friend when I was first teaching school

who drove the staff room crazy because she was insistently cheerful every morning.

I think she genuinely was a morning person

but she may also have taken some perverse pleasure in

her hearty, “Good morning, everyone!” that

aroused a unison groan from her colleagues.

There are those who need that second cup of coffee in the morning,

and then, there are those for whom mornings are really tough:

those who wake up only to be hit by the reality of deep loss;

those who have no job to go to and find themselves out of sync

with the hectic lives around them;

those who need to deliberately think of a reason to get out of bed;

those who are depressed and find sleep a constant draw.

Someone said to me this week,

“Isn’t it remarkable how the new year sparks such optimism in people.”

New year, new resolutions to alter our behaviour,

new possibilities, new days.

I have been singing to myself the hymn by John Keble

that speaks so confidently of new mornings, new days:

*New every morning is the love  
our wakening and uprising prove;  
through sleep and darkness safely brought,  
restored to life, and power, and thought.*

*New mercies each returning day  
hover around us while we pray,  
new perils past, new sins forgiven,  
new thoughts of God, new hopes of heaven.*

Speaking as someone who has experienced depression,

I am not so sure that everyone does find the new year

an opening to possibilities;  
not so sure that everyone can sing “new every morning is the love.”  
Depression can rob you of pleasure,  
sow deep doubt about your value and worth,  
steal your good night’s sleep and darken the days.  
Even positive events are suspect –  
things may change very quickly and joy be lost.  
Depression cheats you into believing dark thoughts  
about yourself, the world around and the future.  
This counsellor captures the power of our beliefs:  
    What we believe about ourselves can hold us hostage.  
    Over the years I have come to respect the power of people’s beliefs.  
    The thing that has amazed me is that a belief is more than just an idea –  
    it seems to shift the way in which we actually experience ourselves  
    and our lives.  
    According to Talmudic teaching,  
    “We do not see things as they are. We see them as we are.”  
    A belief is like a pair of sunglasses.  
    When we wear a belief and look at life through it,  
    it is difficult to convince ourselves that what we see is not what is real.  
    With our sunglasses on, life looks green to us.  
    Knowing what is real requires that we remember  
    that we are wearing glasses and take them off.  
    One of the great moments in life is the moment we realize  
    we have them on in the first place.  
    Freedom is very close to us then.  
    It is a moment of great power.  
    Sometimes because of our beliefs we may never have seen ourselves  
    or life whole before.  
    No matter. We can recognize life anyway.  
    Our life force may not require us to strengthen it.  
    We often just need to free it where it has gotten trapped  
    in beliefs, attitudes, judgment and shame.  
    (Kitchen Table Wisdom, Rachel Remens)

Many people live with beliefs about themselves and the world  
that make mornings tough.  
Does the Christian faith offer genuine hope  
when the new morning breaks and the day looks dark?  
Is there a way to change the way we are so that we can see things differently?  
Are there ways of thinking that can counter balance the weight of feelings?  
Does it always have to be, as a current expression puts it, “same old, same old!”

Let me suggest that baptism is key that can unlock the gates,  
a powerful lens through which we can see ourselves in God’s world.  
On this day, as we recall the baptism of Jesus,

let's think about the grace God provides through this sacrament.

Luke tells us of John baptizing in the wilderness.

All kinds of people come to him  
and he tells them, bluntly, to change their ways  
and live ethically.

After all the people were baptized, Jesus was baptized.  
As he prayed, the heavens opened and a dove descended.  
A voice said, "You are my Son, the beloved;  
with you I am well-pleased." (RSV)

Or, as another version puts it:

"You are my Son, chosen and marked by my love,  
pride of my life." (The Message)

You might think that God's approval was for Jesus alone.

The Christian tradition believes that  
this is God's joy with each person who is baptized.

This is the kind of joy we hear about Israel in Isaiah:

"Do not fear, for I have redeemed you;  
I have called you by name, you are mine." (Isaiah 43:1)

"I give Egypt as your ransom,  
Ethiopia and Seba in exchange for you.

Because you are precious in my sight and I love you." (Is. 43:4)

All peoples and each person is of infinite worth to God  
and when, at baptism, we are called by name  
and claimed by God through Jesus Christ,  
that worth is shouted out loud for the whole assembly to hear!

"You are precious in my sight and I love you."

"You are my child, chosen and marked by my love,  
pride of my life."

That's the first grace that baptism gives us.

God has claimed us and God rejoices in us.

The second is this:

when we are baptized, we go into the water.

Water has both the power to kill and to give life.

In the mystery of baptism,  
we die under those waters, like Jesus died.

In the mystery of baptism,  
we rise from death to new life, like Jesus did at resurrection.

"The old Adam dies and a new Adam is born"

is how a church father like Luther would describe it.

The waters of baptism become the waters of God's womb  
and we are "born anew to a living hope."

While we might argue that God's joy was in Jesus  
but doesn't stretch to include us,

the Christian tradition teaches that, in baptism,  
we are joined to Jesus Christ.  
He lives in us and we in him.  
For that reason alone, then, we share the joy  
that God felt toward Jesus.

If that is the case, why is it so hard to believe it?  
Why do some of us and probably all of us sometimes,  
feel that we are unloveable?  
Well, beliefs, even if they are unfounded,  
can be tough to change.  
There may be circumstances of our early lives  
that make us vulnerable to the sense of being unloveable.  
When we wear that particular pair of sunglasses we see the world that way  
and the world usually proves us right!  
To put on new glasses,  
and give ourselves time to adjust to wearing them,  
to begin to see ourselves as beloved by God,  
as precious and loved,  
takes time and it takes persistence.  
When Martin Luther was questioned about how people  
could continue to mess up, even after they went through the waters of baptism,  
he responded: “Old Adam is a strong swimmer!”  
Old Adam is a strong swimmer but the new Adam wants to be born  
and that new birth is an even more powerful force.  
Depression is part of that Old Adam, the gloom-invoking glasses.  
Baptism frees the life that God gave us from captivity.  
Once we are freed, we need to nurture the awareness of God’s  
on-going love, care and protection.  
We need to practise our baptismal faith.  
The hymn-writer gives us one path as he puts into verse  
beliefs about God’s care for us:

*New every morning is the love  
our wakening and uprising prove;  
through sleep and darkness safely brought,  
restored to life, and power, and thought.*

The new morning, the break of daylight, the life we have,  
is a gift from a loving God.  
Each morning is the gift of life itself.  
Each morning, as light begins to fill the sky,  
God greets us:  
“You are my child, chosen and marked by my love, pride of my life.”