

In Isaiah this morning we heard, *Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; . . . when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you.* (Isaiah 43:1-2) God tells Israel and us that we belong to God who has called us by name, we are God's. When we pass through the waters of baptism God is with us, when the Holy Spirit burns within us it will not consume us only guide us and burn away what is not of God.

Then we heard John the Baptist, *I baptize you with water; but one who is more powerful than I is coming; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.* (Luke 3:16) Jesus will baptize his people with the flame of the Holy Spirit.

In Luke Jesus is baptized after John is arrested. After John's arrest by Herod Luke writes, *Now when all the people were baptized, and when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying.* (Luke 3:21) Jesus is praying, probably by himself since that is what he does once he begins his ministry. Jesus has been baptized and is praying and then *the heaven was opened, and the Holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased."* (Luke 3:22) Jesus has his own epiphany. Jesus is praying before beginning his ministry, after John has been arrested by Herod which we jumped over in the lectionary this morning. Only then does the Spirit descend on him and he hears the words, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased." God has assured Jesus, the very human Jesus that he is the Beloved of God. He is assured of God's love and mercy in his life as he claims his own identity in the world. Now he can begin his ministry as John's life and ministry is ending. John's work of preparing the way is done, now Jesus begins his work in the world. In Luke's gospel only Jesus hears God's words to him while he is praying. The next sentence in Luke's gospel is, *Jesus was about thirty years old when he began his work.* (Luke 3:23)

And the next thing that happens according to Luke is that, *Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness, where for forty days he was tempted by the devil.* (Luke 4:1-2) Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit that has just descended on him and filled him now drives him into the wilderness where he will be tempted with economic, religious and political power. All the things that we are tempted by in our lives. And Jesus rejects every form of social and religious power. He knows his identity as God's Beloved Son and that is enough.

As we begin the season of Epiphany, which means a moment of sudden realization we hear how Jesus had his own epiphany as he prayed in solitude. He has a moment of 'consolation' as Ignatius would call it. It is an experience where he perceives his identity as the Beloved Son of God and begins his ministry and teaching from that moment. Jesus also frequently goes off to pray by himself and listen for God's guidance in his own life. He is fully human as well as divine. A consolation in Ignatian spirituality is a moment of connection with God that one can remember and call upon when everything seems dark and we are afraid. It is meant to remind us that God is with us all the time. Jesus had this

consolation before he goes into the wilderness and is tempted with social and religious power. He can resist the evil that would draw him to various types of social and religious power because he knows his identity as the Beloved of God.

Those who are baptized and realize that they are loved and empowered by the same Spirit of God will grow into their own faith and ministry in the world. Just as Jesus did in his life. All of us in this faith community are part of the Jesus Movement, as our Presiding Bishop likes to say, because we are empowered by the Holy Spirit and sent into the world to bear God's love. We are sent by our baptism to call others to join us in bearing the light of Christ into our world. We are to stand up to oppression in all its forms, to work against the powers of this world that seek to destroy the dignity of God's people and God's creation. We are called to step forth beyond our fears and do the work of bringing God's kingdom to fruition in our communities, to release the captives, to feed the hungry, to heal the sick, to work for peace and reconciliation among all people. We are to seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving our neighbor as we love ourselves.

Turning to the Acts passage for this morning, Peter and John go to Samaria. Samaria, the place of the Samaritans who the Jews considered 'those people'. This was like telling Americans immediately after 9/11 to go to Iran or Pakistan because there were believers there. So the Jewish-Christian leaders in Jerusalem send Peter and John to the Samaritans. Think of someone you really don't want to talk with or be around, that is who Peter and John are going to stay with and talk to about what it means to be a follower of Jesus Christ. And as Peter and John prayed and laid their hands on them the Samaritans received the Holy Spirit. The passage shows how the church is called to cross cultural barriers to reach those we would rather not associate with from whatever country we are from. Samaritans and Jews detested one another yet here are Samaritans receiving the Holy Spirit from Jewish followers of Jesus. The church is called to move beyond our own prejudices and fears to let the Holy Spirit flow through us to others in situations where we least expect it to happen.

Christ the King is a multi-cultural church. We have members from around the world. We have different theologies and expectations of what church should be. Each Sunday we come together to worship God and follow Jesus. As part of our membership in the Vitalization Cohort Project we are being called to move beyond our comfort zones and engage with our neighborhood outside our church doors. As we move out of the pandemic this year Christ will reveal to us how we can better serve him in the world. But first we must work on growing together as one Body in Christ. Next Sunday is our annual parish meeting. We need to lift up new leaders from within our church. The Innovation Team has worked for 6 months to identify a learning agenda for us for 2022, which they will present to the congregation in two weeks, on Jan 23rd after the morning service. One area that rose to the top of the agenda is that the church needs to lift up new leadership that is innovative, flexible and will persevere by taking risks and moving beyond the comfort of one's own group to work together, while discerning the Spirit's call for our church. We as Christ the King are to be open to the Spirit's guidance just as Jesus was open to the Spirit in his life as he prayed before beginning his ministry. The

church is called to move beyond our own prejudices and fears to let the Holy Spirit flow through us, to truly be one Body in Christ our Lord.