

Hear, O Israel: The Lord is our God, the Lord alone. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might. Amen.

When we gathered on Christmas Eve, we considered how the incarnation, God becoming a human child, born in obscurity, was a profound message from God of God's faith that we could change; that we human beings could become what God intended at our creation; that we could become beautiful.

This Sunday, the first Sunday after Epiphany, we revisit Jesus' baptism in the Jordan river. Our readings this week take in the full scope of God as creator, as Spirit, and incarnate as human. And after the week we've had as a nation, I think these readings speak clearly to the place we find ourselves as a people.

Our reading from Genesis reminds us that God is the force of existence that transcends time and matter; that it is with God's very breath that creation takes life. We take this reminder into our Gospel reading from

Mark where this same God has become human, and goes out into the desert to partake in the baptism of repentance.

Jesus, God in human form, we believe was without sin; and yet, here he is undertaking a baptism of repentance. I believe that God is telling us that repentance, though often an individual amendment of life, is also a collective necessity. God in human form undergoing the baptism of repentance tells us that simply because we are members of the human family, we are responsible for making right the wrongs that we see around us.

To repent means to change direction; to turn around; to move forward in a different way. When God became human, God saw the need for us, all of us, to repent; to change direction. And as a member of the human family, God recognized our interdependence; none of us live, or choose, or operate in isolation from the other; and looking at the world around him, Jesus made this act of repentance part of his ministry on earth. Jesus, the Son of God who was without sin, *could* say he'd done nothing wrong, and that he had no share in the inequity and evil he saw about him; but Jesus, God incarnate and without sin, recognized that as a human being he was

implicated in the systems and structures human beings had shaped, and he was therefore responsible to make right the wrongs inflicted by those systems on those around him.

Jesus was the fulfilment of the words of the prophets that we've read in the last few weeks: I, the Lord, love justice and hate wrongdoing; God has anointed me to bring good news to the oppressed and bind up the brokenhearted; God doesn't want worship that is merely a show, but instead let justice roll down like waters and righteousness like an everflowing stream. Jesus saw that he had an obligation to repent of the wrongs of humanity; he was not exempt or excluded because of his individual sinlessness; he was responsible because he lived a life that was fully human, and as Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel said, few may be guilty, but all are responsible.

God became incarnate because God had faith that we could change; God had faith that no matter how far we've wandered from the way of love, we could fully realise the beauty of our creation and be made whole, and renewed in peace. This week, our sisters and brothers of colour in this country may be struggling to share that faith. After 400 years of brutality

and dehumanisation, we watched the symbols of slavery and white supremacy paraded through this nation's Capitol; we saw a noose raised on the Capitol grounds, a reminder of the terrorism of lynching; and we saw how the assumption of criminality meant that black and brown people, even when protesting peacefully, are met with a threat of violence; while mostly white people are given the assumption of goodwill, and allowed to threaten violence in places meant to be sacrosanct. And we saw the name of God and the holy name of Jesus invoked in acts of hatred. I believe that I must hold onto the faith that God showed in God's incarnation; God's faith that human beings can change; and that no matter how far they've strayed from the love and image of God, they can still become beautiful people. My own baptism demands that I keep that faith. It is harder some days than others; but because faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen, I also believe that the grace of God is sufficient for the change people *must make*, to become reality.

The baptism of the Son of God demands that we clearly recognise and name the wrongs committed in our life together that must be righted; the baptism of the Son of God demands that we change direction, turn around, and move forward in a different way; the baptism of the Son of God

demands that we live in the reality that repentance, like redemption, is collective and not just an individual pursuit; that as human beings we are all responsible for the world we live in, both what is good in it and what is harmful in it. But most of all, the baptism of the Son of God calls us to fully live into our humanity as we were created, so that the divine can live fully in us. Living into this baptism opens us up to the renewing Spirit that can make us a new creation in Christ; and that same Spirit that moved over the face of the deep at creation can move through us and reach even those who have fashioned a false god in the image of their worst selves, and who demand a Jesus that builds an earthly kingdom for them long after God made it known that was *not* what Jesus' life and sacrifice was about.

We are in a hurtful, hate-filled, and dangerous time; sometimes it seems that lies are more powerful than love, but that is never so. Sometimes it seems that we as a human family can never achieve the justice that would allow us to heal and be made whole. Sometimes it seems that moment in our creation that God looked on us, made in God's image, and said that our creation was very good, is lost forever. But God came among us; fully identified with the human family and took on the responsibility that entailed; and went to the baptismal waters of repentance to begin the work of

change that is the human family's only hope of salvation; God incarnate rose from those baptismal waters full of the Holy Spirit, anointed to bring good news to the oppressed and comfort to the brokenhearted. We are given the same work; and we are given the same Spirit, which working in us, can do infinitely more than we could ask or imagine. May it be so.