

“Renew, Refresh, Restore, Re-commit”  
B, Epiphany Two; Mark 1:4-11;  
January 14, 2018; 10:00 am  
Congregational UCC, Buena Vista, CO  
Rev. Rebecca K. Poos

### I. YOU’VE HEARD IT SAID.....

You have heard it said:

Almost everything will work again if you unplug it for a few minutes --  
*including you!*

You have heard it said:

“There is nothing in nature that blooms all year long, so don’t expect  
yourself to do so either.”

You *might* have heard that Audrey Hepburn said:

“People, even more than things, have to be restored, renewed, revived,  
reclaimed, and redeemed; never throw out anyone.”

And, we should add: “including yourself.”

Last Sunday, we challenged ourselves, in this new year, not to make  
resolutions, but to:

- a) Look for the GOOD news!
- b) MAKE the good news happen!
- c) Change the world by BEING the Bridge:
- d) GROW the world and the life you want to see in yourself.
- e) Plant the flowers you wish to see in the world!

But, I say unto you: We can’t do that on our own, or by ourselves. We  
can only shine the light by “letting the light shine” that is the Holy  
Spirit within us, shining out and through us.

And so, I say unto you: “Come to the water.”

You’ve heard Jesus say:

Come to the water, stand by my side,  
I know you are thirsty, you won’t be denied.

“Come to me, all you who labor and are burdened, and I will give you  
rest. Take **my yoke** upon you and learn from me, for I am meek and  
humble of heart; and you will find rest for yourselves. For **my yoke is**  
**easy**, and **my** burden light.”

Come to the water. Come to renew, refresh, restore, re-commit.

### II. WE ALL KNOW WATER

Today, this Holy Day in the Season of Epiphany, we come to the  
water. The Living Water. We remember that we are creatures of  
water: from 60-70% of our bodies is composed of water and 70% of  
the earth is water.

Bruce Epperly reflects: “Water matters: we need to hydrate  
ourselves spiritually as well as physically, refreshing ourselves daily  
in the waters of baptism and remembering our baptisms as a  
talisman against fear, anxiety, and cowardice in such a time as this.”

Not just once a year, but daily!

We hear today from The Gospel of Mark how God’s spirit descends  
on Jesus, infusing him with power and insight for the journey ahead.

Epperly suggests that perhaps the act of baptism is a “Thin Place”  
like the Celtic spiritual guides claim. For Jesus, *and* for us. That in  
this act we open ourselves, with Jesus, to God’s power, presence and  
insight for fully and invite the Spirit to work in our lives and infuse  
us and our communities with loving energy. And that when we open  
ourselves to the thin places, we live sacramentally—everything  
becomes holy.

“Sacraments are not supernatural interruptions of causal  
relationships, nor are they necessary for salvation (or to liberate us  
from hell), they make sacred the ordinary, domestic, and everyday  
events of our lives. Remembering our baptisms, even if we were  
infants, provides a portal through which, divine vibrations can  
energize and transform our lives.”

“We remember baptism as a sign of our “original wholeness”  
(Thomas Merton) in the midst of challenging experiences that fill us  
with fear and doubt. Baptism reminds us that if God is for us, who  
can be against us.”

We all know water. And Baptism in water is a powerful force in the  
life of a Christian. It connects us with others throughout the world  
and throughout the ages who have “come to the water.”

Martin Luther King, in his history-changing work and mission, as he lived out his faith and calling, was often at the front of the crowd and received his share of stinging high-pressure water hoses.

Rev. King once remarked that he and the other marchers had a common strength. He put it this way, as "we went before the fire hoses; we had known water. If we were a Baptist or some other denomination, we had been immersed. If we were Methodist, and some others, we had been sprinkled, but we knew water."

Baptism calls us together in a common force for good and Light.

### **III. WHY BAPTISM? TO BE RESTORED TO WHO WE ARE**

Baptism also reminds us of who we are. And as we remember our baptism in a ritual way, we remember our true selves: beloved children of God. Sometimes we forget this to our peril.

Henri Nouwen: One of the greatest dangers in the spiritual life is self-rejection. When we say, "If people really knew me, they wouldn't love me," we choose the road toward darkness. Often we are made to believe that self-deprecation is a virtue, called humility. But humility is in reality the opposite of self-deprecation. It is the grateful recognition that we are precious in God's eyes and that all we are is pure gift. To grow beyond self-rejection we must have the courage to listen to the voice calling us God's beloved sons and daughters, and the determination always to live our lives according to this truth.

Many voices ask for our attention. There is a voice that says, "Prove that you are a good person." Another voice says, "You'd better be ashamed of yourself." There also is a voice that says, "Nobody really cares about you," and one that says, "Be sure to become successful, popular, and powerful."

But underneath all these often very noisy voices is a still, small voice that says, "You are my Beloved, my favor rests on you." That's the voice we need most of all to hear. To hear that voice, however, requires special effort; it requires solitude, silence, and a strong determination to listen.

That's what prayer is. It is listening to the voice that calls us "my

Beloved."

In reminding ourselves of our "baptized-ness" we also remember (because we forget) that we are "made in the image and likeness of God." And that this is pretty awesome! Even presumptuous, if you think about it. In the Judeo-Christian story of Creation, we are, in fact, "created in the *image and likeness* of God" (Genesis 1:27 and 5:2).

Richard Rohr encourages us to live as if we truly believe that—about ourselves as well as others.

"Image" is our *objective* DNA that marks us as creatures of God from the very beginning. "Likeness" is *our gradual realization* of this utterly free gift of the image of God. It's all too easy to recognize our daily unlikeness to God in ourselves and others, so we have a hard time believing this could be true in ourselves or others. [We need practice; tools of the faith] that will allow us to rest in and trust this deeper and truest self.

Rohr adds: "We are not so much human beings trying to become spiritual. We're already inherently spiritual beings and our job is learning how to be good humans! I believe that's why Jesus came as a human being: not to teach us how to go to heaven, but to teach us how to be a fully alive human being here on this earth."

### **IV. WHY BAPTISM? TO BE REFRESHED AND REMINDED—WHOSE WE ARE**

Baptism renewal reminds us who we are and whose we are. We need that, especially when life gets tough!

PRESENTED TO GOD: Written by **Donna Schaper**

My little brother's linen and frilled baptismal robe hung in the coat closet at my house for decades. He is now past 50. One day he called and wanted it. I said, your children are grown, so are mine. Why?

Because, said he, I want it near me. Why? I said again.

I want to remember that I was presented to God and that God took me in. But why now?

Because, he said, life has become very hard for me. My first wife

and my first child are angry with me again. My second wife just hit my only son. My third wife is tired of hearing me talk about my first and second wives.

Aha. Life becomes too much for many of us, many times. We realize at Christmastide that we not only have to rely on a child for salvation (!) but also have to rely on our own childhood. It is never too late to have a happy childhood, I have quipped often.

It is also never too late to remember our baptism – "Baptismatus Sum" – as a touchstone of all of God's promises. We too have been presented to God. And God accepted the present of us.

When life becomes too much for us, O God, let us remember Whose we are.

## **V. WHY BAPTISM? TO RE-COMMIT TO BEING ON THE JOURNEY WITH CHRIST**

And finally, Baptism-remembering helps us to re-commit.

Rohr: Remember, the divine *image* is objectively held by all people, but we each have to choose to grow in our *likeness* to God. That is our primary task on this earth. God always sees and loves the image; we tend to get distracted by the likeness.

We must discover and accept what unique part of the divine mystery is ours to reflect. *All* each of us can give back to God is what God has already given to us. We must choose it, respect it, and allow it to blossom. The most courageous thing we will ever do is to bear humbly the mystery of our own reality, to trust our the divine image and grow in God's likeness. It is simply a matter of becoming who we already are.

You have heard it said:

"Maybe the journey isn't so much about becoming anything. Maybe it's about unbecoming everything that isn't really you, so you can be you were meant to be in the first place."

Baptismal waters wash off the dirt and layers that encase and encrust us—wash us and set us free!

Will you re-commit, today, to growing in the likeness of God? To becoming who you already are? To allowing the waters to renew, refresh, restore and remove that which isn't the true you? That

which has covered over and obscured your essential self in Christ?

## **VI. COME TO THE FONT**

You've heard it said:

"How cool is it that the same God who created mountains and oceans and galaxies looked at you and thought the world needed one of you, too."

Mary Oliver challenges us, again and again:

"Tell me, what is it you plan to do with your one wild and precious life?"

And I say unto you:

What *will* you do with this one, incredible life you've been given? Come to the font, so that you might be renewed, refreshed, restored, and thus re-commit to finding out and living that one incredible life to the fullest, in God—knowing who and whose you are. Amen.

Let us come to the font.....