

# Sermon for Sunday, January 12, 2020 - "Signs of New Creation"

Baptism of Our Lord - First Sunday after Epiphany  
Haiti Remembrance Service  
Good Shepherd Lutheran Church  
Decorah, Iowa  
Rev. Amy Zalk Larson

[Click here to read scripture passages for the day.](#)

Beloved of God, grace to you and peace in the name of Jesus. Amen.

In her book, *A Witness*, Renee Splichal Larson reports that when Haitians speak of the earthquake they say, "Everyone lost someone, and some lost everyone ... some people lost their entire families, including their houses and whatever future they had planned." This great loss of life was caused not only by the severe earthquake but by chronic issues facing Haiti after centuries of colonialism and oppression, racism, poverty and climate change.

Today we remember and we lament.

Today we also lament with dear Tabita and her family, with all who grieve Mary Herman, Dylan Delany, Spencer Douglas, Grace Erickson, and those killed in the Ukrainian jetliner shot down over Iran. We also lament over escalating tensions in the Middle East, the plight of refugees, children detained on our southern border, and so much more.

There is so much that is so wrong in our world. We lament and bring this all to you, O God. We long for your saving help; we long for you to make things right.

As we lament and pray, we need to pay attention when Jesus tells how all righteousness will be fulfilled - that is, how things will be made right in our world.

**What** Jesus says about this in our Gospel reading today is really surprising. Jesus says that he needs to be baptized by John in order to fulfill all righteousness, that his baptism is part of the way that God is making things right in the world. How can that be? How can one baptism make things right?

It appears that John is surprised by all this as well. John also longs for God's righteousness and justice. Just before Jesus' baptism he rages against all that is wrong with the world. He attacks the religious leaders saying, "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?"

John calls people into a baptism for repentance. And he says that Jesus is coming to make things right, that Jesus will come with a winnowing fork to separate the wheat and the chaff and burn the chaff with unquenchable fire. John seems to think Jesus is going to come in a bold, angry way to set things right. Yet just after all that, Jesus shows up to undergo John's baptism for repentance. When John objects to this, Jesus says, "Let it be so now", and explains in this way all righteousness is fulfilled.

Instead of coming with vengeance and power, Jesus wades deep into the River Jordan. As he does,

Jesus wades deep into our human condition with all its misery, sin and suffering. There Jesus stands with all of us who are in need of mercy and healing and new life. He takes on our humanity fully and completely, even receiving a baptism for repentance.

And this is just the beginning. Right after his baptism, Jesus is sent into the wilderness to undergo temptation and testing. As his ministry continues he suffers, feels forsaken, and is killed.

In Jesus, God stoops down to meet us where we are, descending deeply into what it means to be human, even unto death itself.

In Jesus, God becomes one with us. God takes on everything that could separate us from God, everything that is wrong with the world. Beloved, there is truly nothing that can separate you from God. God shares in it all with you.

But that's not all. Jesus also enters into the waters, into the world, to raise up a new creation from the waters of the old. Jesus enters deeply into our world to transform it and all of us from within, to make all things new.

Jesus' baptism is the beginning of this new creation. In the very beginning, the Spirit of God moved over the waters and God spoke creation into being. So, too, in Jesus' baptism the Spirit moves over the waters and God speaks a new creation declaring, "This is my Beloved Son with whom I am well pleased."

These words echo God's ancient promise spoken of a servant who will bring a new creation not with power and might but by entering human suffering, a promise spoken through the prophet Isaiah, "Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights; I have put my spirit upon him; he will bring forth justice to the nations. See, the former things have come to pass, and new things I now declare; before they spring forth, I tell you of them."

Jesus, God's suffering servant, is the one who will bring justice and righteousness, who will make all things new.

God's new creation has begun in Jesus' life, death and resurrection and is now breaking into our world. It can be so hard to see this, but there are signs and glimpses of it everywhere. We see them in the hope and resilience of the people of Haiti, in the music offered last night in a glorious concert and this morning, in the way the Decorah community is supporting Tabita and her family. Here today there are signs and glimpses of God's new creation in bread and wine and water and in each of us.

We are all drawn into God's new creation through baptism and holy communion. Through bread and water and the word, God speaks a new creation into being over each of us, saying, "You are my beloved child in whom I delight. Your sins are forgiven. You are raised to new life. I am with you forever and nothing will separate you from my love."

We are drawn into God's new creation through these sacraments and we too are made into signs of this new creation for the sake of the world.

As we hear in the prophet Isaiah ...<sup>5</sup>Thus says God, the Lord, who created the heavens and stretched them out, who spread out the earth and what comes from it, who gives breath to the people upon it and spirit to those who walk in it: I am the Lord, I have called you in righteousness, I have

taken you by the hand and kept you; I have given you as a covenant to the people, a light to the nations,<sup>7</sup> to open the eyes that are blind, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon, from the prison those who sit in darkness.

We become signs of the presence and promise of God, signs that God is at work to make all things new.

This is how Ben Splichal Larson lived and died - as a sign of God's presence and promise in the world.

When he died Ben's family wrote this about him: "As an infant Benjamin Judd Uling Splichal Larson was wrapped in the arms of God in the waters of baptism, and from those waters his life was an outpouring of love and joy, laughter and play, music and song, in response to God first loving Ben."

Even as Ben died, he was singing of God's presence and promise in the world. Even in his death, he helps us to see the new creation that God is bringing about through us for the sake of the whole creation. So today, we lament and we sing. For our Hymn of the Day today we will join the song Ben sang as he died; we'll join our voices with his as witnesses to what God is doing in Christ Jesus.

Thanks be to God for Ben's witness.

Thanks be to God for each of us, each of you, who are drawn into God's new creation through baptism and holy communion.

You too are signs of God's presence and God's promise.

You are how God is making all things right, all things new.

Let's take a moment for silent prayer.