

Sunday, April 16th, 2023

**Following Jesus as Anabaptists:
Examining our Roots, Imagining our Future
Believers Baptism**

Lighting the Christ Candle and Peace Lamp

This morning, we *Light the Christ Candle* to remind us of the Risen Jesus' presence with us today and we light the *Peace Lamp*, a symbol before us of the peace that Jesus speaks into our fear.

For our hymn of Gathering, we will be singing voices together #10, Here in this Place. As we continue to journey in this season of Easter, I invite you to imagine this song on the lips of the disciples as they continued to dwell in that mysterious 40-day period of encounters with the Risen Jesus, encounters on a mountain, behind locked doors, and on the beach. In those places, the new light of Christ streamed forth into their fears and dreamings. May that light stream forth this morning as well.

Hymn of Gathering

VT # 10 Here in this Place

Call to Worship Voices Together #869

Group 1: We are a covenant people,
called to God by God,
generation through generation.

**Group 2: We are a covenant people,
called to Jesus by Jesus,
losing our life to gain our life.**

***Together: We are a covenant people,
called to church by the church,
weaving together the strong and the weak,
the stranger and the friend.***

**Group 2: We are a covenant people,
called to Jesus by Jesus,
losing our life to gain our life.**

Group 1: Renamed.

Group 2: Reborn.

***Together: Renewed.
We gather ourselves
in the community of believers.
We gather ourselves unto you.***

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Welcome

Good morning, Covenant People – People called by God and gathered in the common pursuit of following Jesus. This morning we continue in our worship series “Following Jesus as Anabaptists: Examining our roots, Imagining our Future.” Last week we began our series by acknowledging the importance of staying true to our roots while also remaining open to “growing wings,” and innovating as the Spirit calls us to new ventures of faith. Today, we will look at one important strand of the Anabaptist-Mennonite root system, the strand of “Believers Baptism.”

The word “Believers” in “Believers Baptism” indicates something of the historical origin of Anabaptism as well as a key feature of Anabaptist belief: “who should be baptized? Those who believe that Jesus is Lord and can offer a public confession of this belief for themselves.” Last week during Experiencing the Story, Clare reminded us of the beginnings of Anabaptism and how it really started to take shape with a meeting between three friends, George, Conrad, and Felix, and their decision to re-baptize each other in defiance of the laws of the state church which mandated infant baptism. Because of their decision, Blaurock would later be executed by burning, and Manz by drowning. What did these early Anabaptists understand their adult baptism to mean, such that they were *even willing* to risk their lives for it? And, what do we understand baptism to mean for us today? Today we make ourselves ask these and other questions. For those of us who have been baptized already and for those who are maybe wondering about baptism, we ask, “what is all the fuss about?” In these and any other questions you may ask today:

Passing the Peace of Christ

May the Peace of Christ be with you.

And also with you.

Prayer of Invocation

God of the Red Sea, of the Jordan River, and of all the waters that you spread out upon the earth, we stand at the shore this morning, listening for you, ready to learn, ready to step in when you call. Lead us deeper in, hold us as we follow Jesus under the water, and bring us to new birth, through your love that never dies. AMEN

Scripture Reader’s Theatre Based on Matthew 28:19-20 and John 21:15-19

Hymn of Preparation

VT #458 The Water Is Ready

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Baptism Stories**

Faith Stories:

This morning as we've begun to explore the meaning of baptism, we've done so not primarily as an intellectual exercise where we debate things like the proper method, the "how" of baptism, but as an exercise in understanding the "who" of baptism: the "who" here being the person seeking or receiving baptism, but also the "who" being the community baptizing and of course, the "who" being the God who calls people to the waters of baptism. For those here who have been baptized, I suspect that your experiences are quite varied and diverse, not only in terms of the "how" of your baptism (be it by immersion, pouring, or sprinkling) but also in terms of how your baptism has been a part of your life stories. This morning we have the privilege of hearing some reflections from Melodie and Paul who will share with us their experiences about their baptisms, as well as their thoughts about how they think about them today.

Baptism Stories were shared

Thank you, Melodie and Paul, for inviting us into your stories about your baptisms. One of the key learnings that I hope we can take away from today is that whatever our experiences of baptism, we are invited to see baptism as not simply a one-time event. Baptism is a crucial part of the root system of faith that continues to empower us for our journey of walking in obedience to Jesus, an obedience that will also ask us to grow wings and venture out in new adventures of faith. So, we do well to remember our baptisms together from time to time. We can do this in two ways. First, for those who have been baptized, we can remember our baptisms in order to renew the commitment that our baptisms ritualized. Second, as a faith community, we can remember our baptisms in order to invite those who have yet to be baptized and may be wondering about baptism to consider whether God is calling them into this important step in the life of faith. We will now have an opportunity to practice both of these ways of remembering our baptisms through corporate prayers.

We will begin with a prayer for those who have already been baptized, and here I would invite you to speak this prayer whether you were baptized as a child or as an adult. I will read the Leader portions and those who have been baptized can read the portion for the baptized.

Prayer Reaffirming our Baptisms

Leader: God of covenant,
when Jesus came up from the waters of baptism,
you claimed him as your beloved child.
Through Jesus
you claim everyone who comes to you as your beloved.

Baptized: As at baptism,

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we confess our faith in you today.**

**By your Spirit,
I will abide in your Word
as wisdom for my life.**

**By your Spirit,
I will give and receive counsel
in the circle of your church.**

**By your Spirit,
I will live without giving in to violence
and take risks for what is good.**

**By your Spirit,
I will share in your mission for the world
with courage and hope.**

**Strengthen us, God of love,
bind us together as your baptized people,
through Jesus Christ,
who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and forever. Amen.**

Mennonite Worship and Song Committee, 2020

And now, I want to invite the whole congregation to speak this second prayer, a prayer for those who may be wondering about baptism. I will read the light print, and you can read the bold.

Prayer for those Wondering about Baptism

Leader: God of wanderers and seekers,
we pray for those who are exploring faith
and those wondering about baptism.
Be with them in their questioning,
in their doubting,
and in their wondering.
Be with them in their confidence,
in their desires,
and in their hopes.

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**People: Be with us in discerning our common life
and guide our counsel.**

**Open us to faith as it grows
in ways both familiar and new
so that we may journey together
as your beloved children.**

**We ask this in the name of Jesus,
who prayed that we might be one
by the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen.**

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