



He Qi, Baptism of Jesus, 2005.

Greetings!

Read [Mark 1: 4-11](#)

Years ago, on my first trip to Israel we studied the Gospel of Mark from beginning to end using the template of the text as our roadmap. The Baptism of Jesus on the Jordan River is a beautiful and unusual place. There are two baptism sites. The one very close to the Sea of Galilee became popularized as a tourist attraction and its accessibility due to active international land disputes. More recent scholarship has led to the other, a more probable site in the Judean wilderness near the Dead Sea, on the Jordanian border. I have remembered the baptism of many pilgrims on the 5 times I have led journeys to the Holy Land. At the site on the Israeli and on the Jordanian side are armed guards, each detachment on the opposite riverbank. The border patrol military personnel watch Christians of all denominations and traditions come to these places but are at the ready to draw their weapons and shoot.

Under this scene I begin to pray:

***Brothers and sisters in Christ:***

***Through the Sacrament of Baptism***

***we are initiated into Christ's holy Church.***

***We are incorporated into God's mighty acts of salvation***

***and given new birth through water and the Spirit.***

***All this is God's gift, offered to us without price.***

I bless the water:

***When nothing existed but chaos,  
you swept across the dark waters  
and brought forth light.  
In the days of Noah  
you saved those on the ark through water.  
After the flood you set in the clouds a rainbow.  
When you saw your people as slaves in Egypt,  
you led them to freedom through the sea.  
Their children you brought through the Jordan  
to the land which you promised.  
In the fullness of time you sent Jesus,  
nurtured in the water of a womb.  
He was baptized by John and anointed by your Spirit.  
He called his disciples  
to share in the baptism of his death and resurrection  
and to make disciples of all nations.  
Pour out your Holy Spirit,  
to bless this gift of water and those who receive it,  
to wash away their sin  
and clothe them in righteousness  
throughout their lives,  
that, dying and being raised with Christ,  
they may share in his final victory. [1]***

And then, new candidates are baptized or the baptism that was already a gift of faith at another time is remembered. God is at work in our lives whether we personally remember our Baptism or not. Both in the invitation to Christian Discipleship through Baptism or in the Blessing of the Water, freedom and hope are given as gifts without price.

Freedom is a powerful gift. Sacred oaths and sacred places make indelible impressions upon us. Almost 40 years ago I made my first trip to Washington DC. We saw national sacred places and documents. I was changed. The reason I became a history buff comes from that visit.

I was stunned at the events in the US Capitol Building on January 6, 2021, a place I visited on that first trip 40 years ago. History will not forget this day nor will I. For some it is believed that this is the beginning of a Civil War, while others quickly point out that a cultural civil war has been at work for a long time.

Abraham Lincoln, the 16th President of the United States, was familiar with both the cultural and actual civil war. In his 2nd Inaugural Address, the shortest of all such presidential speeches, Lincoln offered some of the



Photo: Alexander Gardner, March 4, 1865.

most poignant words and his vision to bring healing for his fellow citizens.

***With malice toward none, with charity for all, with firmness in the right as God gives us to see the right, let us strive on to finish the work we are in, to bind up the nation's wounds, to care for him who shall have borne the battle and for his widow and his orphan, to do all***

***which may achieve and cherish a just and lasting peace among ourselves and with all nations.[2]***

President Lincoln never saw the fulfillment of his vision. Forty-one days later he was dead at the hands of an assassin and a vast conspiracy. Had he lived I wonder how our history would be different? Would he have found a way to lead us to a just and lasting peace? Would there have been Jim Crow? Would he have led us toward the healing of what is now our 400-year pandemic of racism? Would he have coached us out of Nationalism and White Supremacy?

Mark's Gospel narrative of the baptism of Jesus is brief, so is Lincoln's 2nd Inaugural Address and likewise, the Baptismal Covenant I liturgy of the United Methodist Church. All three take less than 5 minutes to read. At the close of the blessing of the water in the liturgy, and at the close of Lincoln's address there are two lines that connect deeply for me.

In the baptismal liturgy and Lincoln's speech, there is no healing or fulfillment in life if we are self-focused. The vision of a healed nation and a graced filled life is possible, when in the context of Baptism, the Holy Other is embraced – we die to self and take on Christ – and in the Nation – there is malice toward none and charity for all and a willingness to bind up the nation's wounds. There is a more current way to say this offered by Fr. Richard Rohr, *"If we do not transform our pain, we will most assuredly transmit it."*[3] Others have offered a variant: *Trauma not transformed is trauma transferred.*

If there is a redemption of the events on January 6, 2021 it will come from light. After all, January 6 is the Feast of the Epiphany - the coming of the wise by way of light, a star. Light will bring redemption by focusing its beam on the truth. And the truth is, we need each other. We need each other transformed. We need transformation that sees the sacred worth of each other to end the cultural trauma transmitted by half-truths, lies, sexism, racism, homophobia, nationalism and white supremacy and the glorification of wealth. In his floor speech on January 6, Mitt Romney, a former presidential candidate and current US Senator from Utah said in the Senate Chamber, "The best way to show respect .... is to tell the truth." [4] Jesus said, "the truth will set you free." [5]

The truth is, beloved, - we must stop transmitting our trauma on one another.

**Remember Your Baptism and Be Grateful!**

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[1] The United Methodist Hymnal, Baptismal Covenant 1, pgs. 33-36, The United Methodist Publishing House, 1989.

[2] <https://www.nps.gov/linc/learn/historyculture/lincoln-second-inaugural.htm>

[3] Rohr, Fr. Richard, Transforming Pain, October 17, 2018.

[4] Romney.senate.gov

[5] John 8:32

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Peace,



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