

Pastor Roy's sermon from January 12, 2014

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

On the first Sunday after Epiphany, we remember Jesus' baptism. He is anointed by the prophet John the Baptist and the Spirit of God. This is where Jesus' ministry begins. He starts alongside everyone else who was baptized by John the baptist. He starts by receiving from all the faithful who have gone before him.

Jesus is also set apart as one to whom we should listen and follow carefully. The Spirit comes upon Jesus with power in this moment. Matthew hears the very voice of God proclaim, "This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased."

John feels unworthy to baptize this special son of Israel.

Do we not have the same response as John? I am unworthy. I am not ready. I am not sure about this at all. I am no different from anyone else, and I have done many things, I have been many things which are not the reign of God.

What if the Spirit calls you to do something that you are not sure you are able to do? To say something that you would rather not say? What if?

John said "Yes." May we have the courage to say "Yes." But what's going on here? Does John really have to make something happen? Or just to be faithful, to do his part to baptize and leave the results to the Spirit?

John was powerless to anoint Jesus with the presence of God. It wasn't about John. It was about the Spirit. It was about the voice of God. It was about the presence of God in the life of Jesus. It was about wisdom and compassion which are the very presence of God.

Is not the same true for us today? We think, "Who am I to do this or say that or to try to bring some compassion to this world of fear, competition, and retribution. Can I make a difference?"

John trusted that his anointing would be filled with the Spirit to make things happen. We can do the same. We do what we can and leave the results to the Spirit. It is not by our strength or power or connections, but by the Spirit that people find hope and good comes to pass. We pray, we hope, we wait. We offer our hands and feet, and finances, and compassion. Then we leave them all with God. Like John.

Faith is having the courage to speak and act in spite of doubts and fears. Faith is the stone hitting the water. The Spirit is the ripples that go out from the impact. Faith is the seed that is sown, the spirit makes the seed grow to produce fruit, or shade.

John's faith was to proclaim a baptism of repentance, to prepare the way, then to step aside. Its hard to step aside when its time to step aside. We have to trust that the Spirit is overseeing, making the connections, drawing out faith and mercy.

If we don't learn to to trust he Spirit, then we will try to force our own version of the spirit and faith. The Spirit never acts violently. It draws, invites, calls, welcomes. Patiently waiting for faith to grow as it grows uniquely in each of us and in our communities.

The Spirit is acting in us and through us. As you follow the voice of the Spirit, you nurture faith in yourself and in this community. Remember John's willingness to do his part. Remember Jesus' willingness to follow the voice of the Spirit however it called him. John felt unworthy, but he acted anyway.

The Spirit of God is at work in us as a group, and in us as individuals. Examples of the Spirit at work are all around us. Let us make time to listen and follow. Amen.