

Epiphany Baptism and Blessing the Water

Matthew 3:13-17 by Patty Friesen (Jan.8/23)

What a joy it is today to baptize Benjamin. Luke and I flipped for it and Luke will do the pouring so watch out Benjamin. I hope you've been nice to Pastor Luke lately. This baptismal water comes from Shekinah Retreat Centre because as Benjamin will share in his testimony, Shekinah has played an important part in seeing God in his life. So we bless this water from the North Saskatchewan River, giving thanks for its life-giving source for all who live along it, both human and animal. It originates in the massive Columbia Icefield between Jasper and Banff and flows through Edmonton and past Shekinah Retreat Centre to Lake Winnipeg, into the Nelson River and eventually into the Hudson Bay and Arctic Ocean, its' final destination.

So too the love of God flows to us from its' source, our Creator and the One who formed us in the womb and loved us through birth and childhood into young adulthood and flows through the entirety of our lives until we are joined again with God in death, our source and our destination.

Benjamin is a home boy, a homie. He was born into our church but since we don't baptize babies and make them Christians, Benjamin had to choose this courageous act of baptism. It is a brave act, a coming out of sorts, to say you want to do and be this and do it in front of a bunch of people, even people you have known all your life.

As part of preparation for baptism, Luke and the deacons and I have shared our own personal faith journeys with Benjamin and have listened to him articulate how he has seen God in his life. In the old days, to get baptized, you had to memorize the

German catechism or the latest confession of faith voted on by the latest Mennonite assembly. We approach catechism differently these days - it's more about sharing about how we experience God personally in our life, not just what we believe is theologically correct. It's the tricycle of Christian faith as Richard Rohr would say - our experiences with God are the front wheel as we try to steer on a safe path through life. How we understand scripture and our tradition are the two back wheels that guide us and keep us balanced. But we can't move forward without our front wheel personal experience of God. And we grow together as a church as we are able to articulate what those front wheel experiences look like.

Together as pastors and deacons, we assured Benjamin that none of us are perfect Christians and that he is joining an imperfect church and some of us have even left church for a while. He has his eyes wide open, he knows what he is getting into and takes this step intentionally in a journey of faith that will take him up and down hills and valleys and into some uncertain places, like Frodo Baggins in *The Hobbit*. But he doesn't go on the journey alone but goes with the Spirit of Christ leading him and the rest of us in the fellowship going beside him.

We've described the two directions of our faith in our vertical relationship with God, Christ and the Holy Spirit and the equal horizontal relationship with our sisters and brothers in faith in the church. Handily it makes a cross so we remember to keep both directions in balance. And so in baptism, Benjamin not only joins himself to Christ but also joins himself to Osler Mennonite Church as the imperfect body of Christ and so as part of this service we will all renew our baptismal vows and join together in communion.

We're so thankful for the way Benjamin has stepped up learning the sound system, ushering and helping with youth. We need him badly here as part of our church and we're going to use all his gifts. He may have to learn to say no but thankfully he comes from a clan of helpers that have trouble saying no and at church, we milk that for all it is worth! I'll invite Benjamin to share his own story at this point and then we'll get him wet.