

John 1:1-5, 9, 10, 12, 14

In the beginning was the Creative Energy:

The Creative Energy was with God

And the Creative Energy was God.

It was with God in the beginning.

Through it all things came to be,

Not one thing had its being but through it.

All that came to be had life in it

And that life was the light of persons,

A light that shines in the dark,

A light that darkness could not overpower . . .

The Creative Energy was the true light

That enlightens all people;

And it was coming into the world.

It was in the world

That had its being through it,

And the world did not know it . . .

But to all who did accept it

It gave power to become children of God . . .

The Creative Energy was made flesh,

It pitched its tent among us,

And we saw its glory,

The glory that is his as the only Child of the Creator

Full of grace and full of truth.

DENNIS THE MENACE



"IF HEAVEN IS THAT PRETTY ON THE BOTTOM, THINK HOW IT MUST LOOK ON TOP!"

"Original Blessing"

We enter a broken and torn and sinful world---that is for sure.

But we do not enter as blotches on existence, as sinful creatures, we burst into the world as "original blessings."

Matthew Fox (Original Blessing, p. 47)

An unexpected thing happened to a five and three year old when they arrived at the playground with their mother. Four teenagers from a fundamental Christian church approached the family and invited the kids to join in their Vacation Bible School games. They did and fun was had by all. Following the games the children gathered around a grown-up for a talk about Jesus. She began her teaching by pulling a big yellow heart with black spots on it out of her lesson bag. Then she asked the children, "What does the color yellow make you think of?" The three year old who loves to eat, yelled out "bananas!" The boy in love with cars hollered "school bus!" Sun, flowers, and Sponge Bob Square Pants trailed right behind from other kids. After that the teacher said, "Yellow makes me think of heaven." Then she asked of the children, "What do you think the black spots on the heart are?" Not one child answered. No one had a clue. Except, of course, for the teacher who was certain of the answer to her own question. She broke the silence by explaining that the black spots are sins that Jesus Christ washes away so that we can go to heaven. "Jesus saves you and Jesus saves me," she told them. "All you have to do is to confess Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior!" When she was done the teacher said that if anybody wanted to be saved they could stand up or raise their hand. That's true, exclaimed someone from the crowd: "Last year my daughter was saved right here!" Immediately upon hearing this, the mother of the two, grabbed her children and high tailed it home. On the way she asked her son who was very concerned about heaven since his dog's death asked him: "Do you know what belief means?" "No," he said. "Well," she said. "You know how your cousin believes that Batman is the best superhero and you believe that Super-man is the

best? And, it's O.K. that you believe different things?" "Yes," he said. "Well," Mom explained, "the teacher in the park believes that God won't let children with sin spots on their heart into heaven. It's O.K. for you to believe something different. I do. And so does your Sunday School teacher at our church."

So . . . next Sunday when the boy went to church, he sat close to the teacher to hear from him what his chances were of heaven. Fearful of the lies he had told, the mistakes he had made, the angry punches he had thrown, and the tricks he had played to get his way, his heart started racing as his teacher opened up the Bible. All he could do was hold his breath, keep his secrets, and see what Jesus had to say about heaven and the sin spots on his heart. That Sunday, the good news came from the gospel writer Mark in his account of Jesus' baptism. **"And just as Jesus was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. And a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased."** (1:10-11)

In her devotional, 'Well Pleased,' Rev. Vicki Kemper writes: 'Every year it is the same in my church. After the sermon, the prayers of the people, and communion, church members begin lining up. Every year they wait patiently for the pastor to trace a cross of water on their forehead, speak their name, and say a few beautiful words. "Blessed are you, Ralph" (and Jay and Carlton), "beloved child of God. With you God is well pleased." "Blessed are you, Skyler (and Ivy, Sara, Charron, and Nancy), "beloved child of God. With you God is well pleased." Every year it is the same: For some, the tears begin flowing even before they reach the glass bowl filled with a mix of clear tap water from the church kitchen and murky stuff from the River Jordan. There is a holy hush as the building inspector, the midwife, the lawyer the teacher, the student the grandparent the retiree, the cis-gender and transgender, the single and partnered, and the young and old of different races stand on line awaiting affirmation of their sacred worth. Faces crumble

as deep speaks to deep. I cannot say how Jesus felt when he came up from the waters of the Jordan and saw the Spirit descending like a dove. I do not know how badly he might have needed to hear that voice of heavenly love. But every year, on Baptism of Christ Sunday, I am reminded that we all long to know God's pleasure in our very existence, and that the heavens are torn open whenever we speak of God's love. And every year, if only for a moment, we are all well pleased.'

"Yes, I'm in!" the boy shouted. After that the class learned to sing: *What a friend we have in Jesus, all our sins and griefs to bear . . .* When the singing was over the boy had a ton of questions for his teacher. Where is heaven? Is it cool? In answer to his questions the teacher took a Dennis the Menace cartoon out of his lesson bag and showed it to them. In the one frame cartoon, Dennis and his friend are standing outside looking up into the sky. Dennis is pointing toward Heaven, saying: "If heaven is that pretty on the bottom, think of how beautiful it is on the top!" After showing them the cartoon, the teacher went on to explain that the beauty of heaven was dancing inside, outside, and all around them. He also told them that Jesus came to teach everyone how to forgive and to open up their heart to let God's sun shine in. When he was done a hand shot up again. "If I am not baptized, will I go to hell?" "No", replied the teacher, "Baptism is not magic. God loves all of God's children. Baptism means entry into the church, the community that teaches us that God loves us, that we are precious in God's sight, and how to live in response to our faith." Then they sang: *"Jesus loves the little children, all the children of the world . . ."*

Adelyn, today is your day of original blessing in which, we, with God through water and word:

Smile widely upon you with Love,
Give you the name of Jesus to light your way,
Bless the Spirit of Compassion to open your heart
And celebrate you as the newest member of Christ's Church.