

Luke 14:1, 7-14

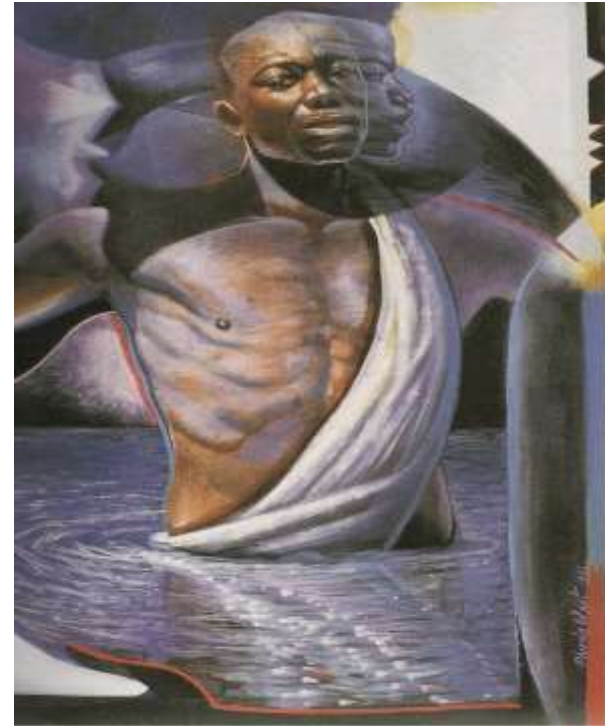
On one occasion when Jesus was going to the house of a leader of the Pharisees to eat a meal on the Sabbath, they were watching him closely.

When he noticed how the guests chose the places of honor, he told them a parable. 'When you are invited by someone to a wedding banquet, do not sit down at the place of honor, in case someone more distinguished than you may have been invited by your host, and the host who invited both of you may come and say to you, 'Give this person your place', and then in disgrace you would start to take the lowest place. But when you are invited, sit down at the lowest place, so that when your host comes, he may say to you, 'Friend, move up higher', then you will be honored in the presence of all who sit at the table with you. For all who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.'

He said also to the one who had invited him, 'When you give a luncheon or a dinner, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbors, in case they may invite you in return, and you would be repaid. But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind. And you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you, for you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous.'

Baptism is the sacrament through which we are united to Jesus Christ and given part in Christ's ministry of reconciliation. Baptism is the visible sign of an invisible event: the reconciliation of people to God. It shows the death of self and the rising to a life of obedience and praise. It shows also the pouring out of the Holy Spirit on those whom God has chosen. In baptism, God works in us the power of forgiveness, the renewal of the Spirit, and the knowledge of the call to be God's people always'. (Book of Worship, United Church of Christ)

"The Posture of Sitting Prayer"



'The Baptism of Jesus Christ' by Pheoris West

In his devotional entitled, 'Again and Again and Again', Rev. Quinn Caldwell wrote: A faithful churchgoer was talking with a skeptical friend about why he bothered going to church. The friend asked him what his favorite part of the service was. "Oh, I love most of it: the (music), songs, the Doxology, (Baptism), Communion. The pastoral prayer can be pretty boring sometimes, but I even get something out of that. Overall, through I guess I would say I get the most out of the sermon." "How many sermons do you think you've sat through in your life?" the friend asked. The man said, "Oh, I don't know. A couple thousand?" "And do you remember them all?" "Of course not!" "Then why bother? What's the point?" The man thought about it for a moment, then asked, "Do you remember every meal you've ever eaten?" "No." "Neither do I," replied the man. "But I sure am glad I ate them." Pastor Caldwell ended his

devotional with this prayer: 'God, I wish I didn't have to feed my spirit so much. I wish I could hear about you just once and then be yours forever. But it looks like I'm going to need to hear it again and again. So send me the discipline to come often to the table of your Word, and send me preachers good enough to keep me fed. Amen'.

It's a Jesus parable that feeds our spirit with the Word of the Lord on this Sabbath day as we gather to celebrate Alicyn's baptism and to remember our own. It's a teaching that gets us thinking about where, how, and who we sit next to in church. On the one hand it's a teaching that stirs up social anxiety and feelings of shame and guilt associated with negative experiences we may have had in church. Like taking someone's 'seat' and being told to move; or being asked to sit up front; or getting pains and grumpiness from sitting in uncomfortable pews. On the other hand, it's a calming teaching of faith that eases our anxiety and stills our fears of shame and guilt by assuring us that 'no matter who we are, whatever we are, or wherever we are on life's journey,' we are invited to humble ourselves, and prayerfully take a seat in God's house as a person of dignity and worth.

Sitting meditation. In his book, 'Wherever you go, there you are,' Jon Kabat-Zinn wrote: Sitting down to meditate, our posture talks to us. It makes its own statement. You might say the posture itself is the meditation. If we slump, it reflects low energy, passivity, a lack of clarity. If we sit tamrod-straight, we are tense, making too much of an effort, trying too hard. When I use the word "dignity" in teaching situations, as in "sit in a way that embodies dignity" everybody immediately adjusts their posture to sit up straighter. But they don't stiffen. Faces relax, shoulders drop, head, neck, and back, come into easy alignment. The spine rises out of the pelvis with energy. Sometimes people tend to sit forward, away from the backs of their chairs, more autonomously. Everybody seems to instantly know that inner feeling of dignity and how to embody it.'

Sitting prayer in church. In the history of Christianity there are diverse body postures for prayer. Sitting joins turning eastward, kneeling, outstretched arms, bowing, and dancing as forms of prayer practices. 'Sitting, though once associated with the prerogative of bishops, came to be associated not only with comfort but with waiting. One sits still to wait on the presence of God, to hear a word from God, without the distractions of having to move about'. (Spiritual Pilgrimage, p. H: 36) In this moment, we sit in wait to hear baptismal words of promise and blessing.

Martin Luther, the great reformer, was clearly a genius and a person of great faith, but he was also something of a tormented soul. Among other maladies, he suffered from what would be called clinical depression today. Out of those depths, he affirmed that there is no greater comfort than baptism. In dark times, he would remind himself: "I am baptized. And through my baptism the God who cannot lie has bound himself to me." ('Getting Ready for Baptism, p. 17). Like him, are we waiting to hear that we are precious in God's sight and of great worth?

And then, 'someone confided about the experience of growing up as a teenager with a terrible case of acne. When she looked into the mirror each morning, she would recoil from what she saw. But then she would splash water on her face and, in the words spoken at Jesus' baptism and echoed in her own baptism, she would say, "I am beloved." (ibid.) Like her, are we waiting to hear that we are a beloved child of God?

And too, Donna Schaper remembered: 'My little brother's linen and frilled baptismal gown hung in the coat closet at my house for decades. He is now past 50. One day he called and wanted it. I said, your children are grown, so are mine. Why? "Because," he said, "I want it near me." "Why?" I asked again. "I want to remember that I was presented to God and that God took me in." But why now? "Because," he said, "life has become very hard for me." (ibid) Like him, are we desiring a closer walk with Jesus and needing Christ to be our friend?

A Time of Reconciliation

L: The invitation to our time of reconciliation is the hymn, 'Create in Me a Clean Heart', number p. 414 in your hymnal.

L: A reading from Genesis 1:1-5.

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters. And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. God saw that the light was good, and God separated the light from the darkness. God called the light "day" and the darkness God called "night." And there was evening, and there was morning-the first day.

Please join me in the response as printed in the bulletin.

P: Crashing Waters at Creation, ordered by the Spirit's Breath; first to witness day's beginning , from the brightness of night's death.

L: A reading from Exodus 14:21-22.

Then Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and all that night the Lord drove the sea back with a strong east wind and turned it into dry land. The waters were divided, and the Israelites went through the sea on dry ground, with a wall of water on their right and on their left.

Please join me in the response as printed in the bulletin.

P: Parting water stood and trembled as the captive passed on through; washing off the chains of bondage-channel to a life made new.

L: A reading from Mark 1:1-9.

The beginning of the gospel about Jesus Christ, the Son of God. 'It is written in Isaiah the prophet:

I will send my messenger ahead of you,
Who will prepare your way,
A voice of one calling in the desert,
Prepare the way for the Lord,
make straight paths for him.'

And so John came, baptizing in the desert region and preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. The whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem went out to him. Confessing their sins, they were baptized by him in the Jordan River. John wore clothing made of camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. And this was his message: "After me will come one more powerful than I, the tongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. I baptize you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.

Please join me in the response as printed in the bulletin.

P: Cleansing water once at Jordan closed around the One Foretold; opened to reveal the glory ever new and ever old.

L: A reading from John 4:13-14.

Jesus said: Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.

Please join me in the response as printed in the bulletin.

P: Living water, never ending, quench the thirst and flood the soul; well-spring, source of life eternal, drench our dryness make us whole.

L: Our Hymn of Assurance is, 'Turn Your Eyes Upon Jesus' number 146 in your hymnal.