

Several years ago, well... more than several years ago, my son Evan, who was eleven years old at the time, on a mission trip to Jamaica. We went with a group of people from various places around the United States. However, when we signed up for the trip, we didn't know a lot about the area or the nature of what we would be doing during the mission. It just felt like the right thing to do. Afterall, by exposing our children to servant work - albeit in another country - we, as parents, were fulfilling the vows we made at their baptisms and mine, too. I began to wonder if this is what it means to live "into" our baptism. That the water was not an isolated shower - individual in nature, but something that would follow us and accompany us throughout our lives. An identity that would define us throughout our lives. A promise... that takes a lifetime to live out.

*Called by the Holy Spirit, trusting in the grace and love of God, you desire to have your children baptized into Christ. As you bring your children to receive the gift of baptism, you are entrusted with responsibilities:*

*To live with them among God's faithful people,  
 Bring them to the word of God and holy supper,  
 Teach them the Lord's Prayer, the Creed, and the Ten Commandments -  
 place in their hands the holy scriptures,  
 And nurture them in faith and prayer, so that your children may learn to trust  
 God, proclaim Christ through word and 'deed', care for others and the world  
 God made, and work for justice and peace.*

*Do you promise, promise...to help your children grow in the Christian faith and life?*  
 Our response... was a resounding "yes!" Our emotive response was reminiscent of the fact that something **big** was happening! I still remember the feeling that something so profound was happening as the waters of baptism were poured over our children's head. I still get that feeling each time a baptism occurs.

And so it was within the context of being called into our baptism, that Evan and I set out on this journey to Jamaica. Something new was about to unfold, and as a mother of a young son heading to a distant land, I have to be honest, there was some reservation about bringing an eleven year old on this mission. And I can't say the rest of the family backed the decision either, since the trip was to take place five months after the tragic event of 9/11 occurred. But nonetheless, we forged ahead and we arrived at the Caribbean Christian Center for the Deaf in Jamaica on

February 7th, 2002. And we thought we were prepared. My son took a sign language class at the local community center and I learned to finger-spell the alphabet. But nothing could have prepared me, or my son, for what we were about to experience as we were immersed in a world without voice.

You see, working in an environment where the entire student body is deaf, was...deafening. The silence was...loud. The noise and clamor of chairs moving when children left their seats and the constant inaudible sounds uttered by the children were in the air, but voice as “we” knew it, was all but nonexistent. But what bothered me the most, was I didn’t know the children’s names and they couldn’t voice their names even if I asked them. So I asked myself, was this what God meant by living into my baptism? Had I gone too far interpreting what “living into our baptisms” meant - for Evan and me? A strange land, an eleven year old, the heat of the day so intense that your clothes would be saturated by noon and... I could not hear the children voice their names.

Today is Baptism of Our Lord Sunday. And we hear the voices of John and Jesus at the water’s edge of the Jordan River. John putting up a protest and Jesus insistent upon what was needed. We also hear the voice of the psalmist today - whereas he depicts the Lord shaking the wilderness, breaking the cedars, flashing forth flames of fire and hovering over the mighty waters - powerful and full of majesty. And then we hear the voice of the prophet, Isaiah; a voice - a quiet voice - full of encouraging words and instructing the people what necessitates the identity of a servant, a servant... chosen by God.

In our world today we also hear many voices crying out from the streets of Venezuela, the streets of Minneapolis, the rubble of Gaza and the remains of Ukraine. We hear voices of those living in fear of starvation and inadequate healthcare throughout the world. And we hear voices of those who appear to be large and in charge. The clamor of “voices” that has me wondering, once again, what *does* it means to live into the promises that named and claimed us at our baptism? What does it mean to embrace the name and our identity we have been given by God, that of: Child of God? Voices. Voices. Voices.

But it is in Matthew’s account of Jesus’ baptism today, that I find myself looking - not necessarily at the singular act or ritual of baptism - but in the significance of today’s exchange between John and Jesus and the transformative power that emerges when Jesus meets John and *us* at the water’s edge. When our

expectations, like John's, lead us down a path that isn't about God's saving, compassionate purpose; but about rigid identities, values and voices which compete for our attention. And the voice that John had been hearing brought him to the conclusion that Jesus is the one who will baptize with spirit and fire; a powerful judge who would bring judgement to the nations; a judge who would *surely* not find his way into the same waters as *him, tending to him?* This is the striking paradox in Matthew's story and perhaps ours, too. You see, John was hoping for a royal messiah, one who would be addressed as God's son - just like kings were addressed at their coronation. One who would bring peace, and justice to all people. But John...John...gets...Jesus, God's son. Whose voice moves upon the waters with a rush of wind and flame and in love, calls John and all who would follow, "Child of God". And out of love that same voice calls us, too; calls us sons and daughters - people of the water and His name.

You know...it's easy to forget the significance of our baptism sometimes, especially when outside voices try to name and claim us. As I reflected on the visual imagery in the Isaiah passage in reference to the bruised reed and the dimly burning wick, I thought of the children I used to teach. Children who were bruised and beaten down and barely able to muster a smile from the time they entered the school until the time they left. Their were voices all around them that called out hurtful names and identities and followed them around all day and sometimes late into the night. And I thought about the times in *my* life when the water was deep, the light was dim and the voices were loud. And then, I thought about the voice of love that called out to Jesus after he came up from the water and said, "This is my Son, the Beloved." THE Beloved. This son, you see, is for all of us! This Beloved's voice is who names us and claims us.

We live in a time and place where we identify with so many names and identities: Democrat, Republican, conservative, liberal, American or foreigner, immigrant, refugee, gay or straight, rich or poor, black or white or brown; honor student, drop out, married, divorced, single; addict, alcoholic; and...Child of God.

Our name. Our identity. Our calling...Our baptism.

You see, wading in the waters with Jesus, changes everything and everyone. And the voice that comes up out of the water today...the Beloved, is the voice that speaks...love. And it is the voice that named and claimed every student Evan and I

encountered at the Christian Center for the Deaf. And that is what I called them, too. I did know their names because living into our own baptism expands our world and we realize that we are all in this together.

So Paula and people of God, do we promise to support each other...and pray for each other ...as we live out our baptism in the transformative waters of Christ. We do.

Amen.