

Watch this week's service on YouTube by clicking: [January 10 Service Worship Video](#)

- Join the **He-Brews eCafé on Zoom** every Sunday at 10am for an hour of informal fellowship. Please join us by clicking <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/82450894254?pwd=bzBvTElPdnJWRVZjTStvRS9taWdpZz09> or phoning 204 272 7920 and entering meeting number 824 5089 4254 and passcode 858358
- Read the scripture lesson for today by clicking here: [Mark 1:4-11](#)
- You may visit the **Lights for Lives Book of Remembrance** here: <https://charleswoodunited.org/lights-for-lives/>
- Do you play a musical instrument? Brendan Thompson wants to 'hear' from you. Details in *Life and Work* or email Brendan at brendandt@hotmail.com
- Michael Wilson's letter about events in Washington is on the Free Press website: [Gaining the World but Losing a Soul](#)
- For news and events please have a look at the **Life & Work** insert: <https://charleswoodunited.org/media/life-work/>
- You can donate to the ministry of Charleswood United Church by visiting: www.charleswoodunited.org/donate. Thank you for your generous support.

Please enjoy our online worship and feel free to share with others. The link for sharing is: <https://youtu.be/IIG1P6S7DEQ>

Dear Friends

Welcome to worship for Sunday, January 10, 2021

As I mention in the service this week, and some of you may have heard me talk about this before, I find the baptism of Jesus story very intriguing. I like to point out that even though only one gospel (Luke) tells the story of Jesus' birth in Bethlehem at an inn with no room, and only one gospel (Matthew) tells the story of three stargazers who present gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh, all four gospels tell the story of Jesus' baptism in the Jordan River at the hands of his cousin John.

Not only that, but all four place the story in a similar context. At the beginning. Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John all agree that before Jesus calls any disciples, performs any miracles, or tells any parables, he finds blessing in going beneath these cleansing waters and emerging to discern the Spirit's presence.

It is intriguing because it is universally told and therefore must have been of great importance to the early church, but also because it was a Jewish ritual of repentance. Even Matthew is troubled by the idea that Jesus stood in need of repentance and adds a line where John the Baptist tries to dissuade him (*it is I who needs to be baptized by you*). But I

think it is abundantly clear that if Jesus was going to share our human life, then he shares our brokenness, and subsequently our need for mercy. Abundant life does not exist in the absence of mercy.

The baptism of Jesus also shows us that Jesus was not adverse to the idea of rituals or participating in religious life. In other words, Jesus sees that one can be both spiritual and religious. It is not a choice as though one was superior to, or the opposite of, the other. Rather they are partners in the dance of discovery about what it means to be fully human.

Too often the story of the Exodus is presented only as a political struggle for the liberation of an enslaved and oppressed people. Of course it is that. But what we forget is that after each of the 10 times that Moses goes to Pharaoh saying “*Let my people go*”, Moses tells Pharaoh that the reason they must be free is so that they can worship. The prophets warn against false or insincere worship (*What does the Lord require but to seek justice, love kindness, and walk humbly.* – Micah 6) but they do so in the hope and expectation that the rituals of Israel will have integrity.

It is a difficult time to sustain many of the rituals, formal and informal, of our communal life. Many can be postponed and become the things that we will look forward to as our society emerges from the pandemic. But rituals around death must be attended to, and frankly, are at their most powerful and useful while we are in the immediate grip of grief. Currently they are severely restricted and families are being incredibly gracious as they do what they can with the hope of celebrating the life at a later time.

My concern is that as the time passes we may forget what an essential need is met by our rituals of grieving. The formal acts of worship and burial to be sure, but also the informal ministry of compassion that is provided by a hug or a shoulder or a meal. These rituals provide order in the midst of chaos. They are what I refer to as meaningful actions in meaningful gatherings.

Jesus goes to the Jordan and receives the gift that John the Baptist offers. The ritual is not an end unto itself but sets the stage for the experience that follows. As he rises out of the water Mark says that the heavens opened and the Spirit descended on him like a dove. In that moment there is no tradition, no intermediary, no religious custom but simply a moment of divine grace, a voice in which Jesus hears “*You are my beloved. In you I take delight.*”

I hope and pray that the little things we do as a Christian community helps you know within your heart that God loves and takes delight in you.

Grace and peace,

Michael