

Good Morning! Let us pray... *Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful, and kindle within us the fire of your love. Send forth your Spirit and we shall be created And you shall renew the face of the earth. O God who by the light of the Holy Spirit did instruct the hearts of the faithful, grant that by the same Holy Spirit we may be truly wise and ever enjoy your consolations, through Christ our Lord. May the words of my mouth & the meditations of all our hearts be pleasing in your sight...rock & redeemer of us all. Amen.*

Baptism of Lord - “A Light to the Nations!” Acts 10:34-43; Matthew 3:13-17

In the month of January 4-18, 2013, I and a small group of classmates traveled together with two professors to India. We were immersed in the culture of a nation of many cultures. We traveled through villages and cities, historic sites and places of everyday survival. We witnessed the contrasts of modernization and of ancient ways still supporting people and traditions. Our focus was learning about agents of change who promote thriving in circumstances. We spent time with non-government providers of health care, agencies focused on restoration for persons recovering from domestic violence and human trafficking, artists, religious communities, seminarians at work in local communities, walking the city streets, exploring, and engaging with leaders of non-government resources for education and vitality in daily living.

Of all the rich and meaningful moments and people I met, there are two that continue to impact decisions in my ministry. The scripture selections read today are anchor texts for these two sacred moments.

Peter’s sermon, given at the house of Cornelius, proclaims his revelation that God, through the life, ministry, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus, is for all people... that there are no persons who do not have access to God.

The Message puts it this way: ³⁴⁻³⁶ Peter fairly exploded with his good news: “It’s God’s own truth, nothing could be plainer: God plays no favorites! It makes no difference who you are or where you’re from—if you want God and are ready to do as he says, the door is open. The Message he sent to the children of Israel—that through Jesus Christ everything is being put together again—well, he’s doing it everywhere, among everyone.

While in the eastern area of India, Kolkata, we spent time in a Hindu village where the seminarians were working with the community, providing education & support in job counseling with men and micro-economic opportunities for women. We walked to the place for feeding the fish (fish farm). As we did so, we walked through the village, past homes and shrines to deities. As we walked, a woman came alongside, took my hand, gave a squeeze, and began to walk with me. She spoke, though I did not understand. Then she stopped and looked me in the eye...and the warmth in my heart was overwhelming. It was as if we were in a

shaft of light... and I knew in that moment what it meant when we say, Namaste... the divine light in me greets the divine light in thee. As Peter did, I understood that our God is a God of all people. When Peter proclaims all are acceptable to God... I know this to be true... it makes no difference who you are or where you are from – if you want God and are willing to live in God's ways, the door is open! All are welcome to God's love, mercy & forgiveness!

We returned to Bishop's College for supper that evening and were connected to our Seminarian who would pick us up for church on Sunday. I met Sebastian, who would soon graduate and have a church of his own. He was fascinated by the fact that I already served as a licensed local pastor and regularly preached. Apparently his senior pastor was impressed also. When I got in the taxi on Sunday morning, Sebastian informed me that I was to give the sermon in worship. I had the 10 minutes during the drive to prepare a message.

The text was Matthew 3:13-17 in the worship guide. I gave thanks to God that I had my trusty Kindle with me and had read the commentaries the night before.

What Word could an American Woman of privilege (Caucasian) bring to people of this Bengalese church in their worship that had meaning and relevance to their lives?

I had only one way to pray... o Lord, you know your people...you have shown me your light is for all... lead me and provide the words for such a time as this! I Trust in you!

The Word that came forth that day, as it does every day, boils down to this: order my steps, Lord, in your word... that I may see thee more clearly, love thee more dearly, follow thee more dearly, day by day. And may my life and ministry be as a light to all I meet...may I see the divine light in each person, and love more like you love me.

At the river, Jesus insisted that John baptize him. John obeyed. The heavens opened and the voice proclaimed love for Jesus...and for those who were witnesses. And, as the story continues, Jesus is led by Spirit into a time of testing in the wilderness. Even today, we remember God's love for us and presence in our lives, even in the midst of trials and challenges.

Friends, now more than ever, United Methodists are confronted with the challenge of loving all persons and honoring the call to serve God and God's people... no matter who they are. We are challenged to see all people as children of the God who created each one of us in God own image.

Though social structures, culture, and human governance are yet again in tension with our understanding of God, I invite us to a time of togetherness in study, prayer, and fasting.

In the next two weeks, I will announce opportunities to gather, listen, learn and discuss Who We are as United Methodists and what plans are before us as a denomination and as a local church.

What I've learned in life, in ministry, and in my walk with God, is that seeking to understand is the first step in drawing close and following God. May we join together, seeking to understand, so that we would fulfill the call to be a light to the nations. May it be so. So be it. Amen.

Prayer

Spirit of God, the times and the season we are in can push us to our limits, and suck us into believing that all the powers around are in ultimate control. But we remember, here before You, they are not. You are in control, and Your purposes will not be thwarted by the work of any inferior power. Help us, Spirit of God, to remind ourselves of this daily through worship. Amen.

Let us now enter a time of renewal and remembering of our baptismal covenant. After the prayer, **UMH 50-52**, All are welcome to Come, touch the water, and remember you are a Child of God, and you are loved beyond measure.

If you have not been baptized, I encourage you to come, touch the water that is a symbol of new life, new direction, new beginning. KNOW that the water is a sign of God's love already present in your life and an invitation to draw near and be renewed.

If you would like to know more of baptism or membership in this church, I encourage you to talk, email or text me in the next few days.

During this time we will sing a song full of covenant and love, You Are Mine.

Now, Won't you Come to the fountain of light, love, grace and peace.

Lay Servants: with oil...**Led by the Spirit, live as a faithful disciple of Christ.**