

# **Possibilities Unfolding**

**Rev. Jeanne Murawski**

**January 9, 2011**

Kyle was nowhere to be found, and I missed him, Rodger Nishioka writes. In the weeks following his baptism and confirmation on Pentecost Sunday, he was noticeably missing.

Several other members of the confirmation class asked about him too, as did his confirmation mentor. Kyle and his family had come to the congregation when he was in the fifth grade. They attended sporadically, so I was more than a little surprised when I asked him and his parents if he was interested in joining the confirmation class and they responded positively. In this congregation, the confirmation class happened during the ninth grade school year. Kyle and his parents came for the orientation meeting and agreed to the covenant to participate in two retreats, a mission activity, work with a mentor, and weekly classes for study and exploration.

Kyle was serious in attending and missed a class or event rarely. He quickly became a significant part of the group and developed some wonderful friendships with other ninth graders who had barely known him. Since Kyle had not yet been baptized, he was not only confirmed, but also baptized on Pentecost Sunday. It was a marvelous celebration for all the confirmands, their families, and their mentors.

That's pretty much where it ended, says Nishioka. That is when I knew we had done something wrong. When I checked in with Kyle and his folks, they all seemed a little surprised that I was calling and checking up on them. I distinctly remember his mother saying, "Oh, well, I guess I thought Kyle was all done. I mean, he was baptized and confirmed and everything. Isn't he done?"

In our reading today from the gospel of Matthew, Jesus' baptism is decidedly not an ending, but a beginning. It is from this point on that he begins teaching and healing, gathering disciples and sharing God's vision for the world. It is at his baptism that Jesus' ministry and mission find their start.

We are only at the beginning of the story, and there is so much more to come. There are twists and turns, zigs and zags on this journey ahead. You see, the people of God thought they knew what the messiah was supposed to be. They thought they knew what the messiah was supposed to do. How he would act, what he would say.

But Jesus' baptism marked the beginning of a ministry full of surprise and possibilities. The people expected a powerful conqueror, but they received instead, a faithful servant.

Just like the servant spoken of by the prophet Isaiah, Jesus' mission was to bring about justice. He brought about the new covenant we speak of in our communion liturgy. He was a light to the nations to give sight to the blind, to free the captive, and bring about a new day.

As we read through the gospel of Matthew together in worship this year, we will hear Jesus' ministry through the lens of one who envisioned Jesus as the messiah as foretold in the Hebrew Scriptures. We have the opportunity to hear both testaments with fresh perspective and new life. As we journey together, I pray that we will come out the other side transformed and renewed.

It is through the life of Christ, we come to know God more fully. And through Christ we are shown the face of a God who is generous with grace, calling people into community, restoring us to greater light and life.

Which is why, as we head into another new year, it is only fitting that we also take time to consider baptism. Not just Jesus' baptism, but our baptisms as well. You see, it is through our baptisms that we, too, begin our journeys and enter the faith.

Each one of us who has been baptized has been welcomed into the body of Christ. Each one of us who was confirmed has taken on the promises of baptism as our own, promising to live and grow in Christ.

We hear it every time a family brings a child forward, every time an adult makes a confession of faith, every time a confirmation class stands in the chancel. You know the familiar questions...

Do you promise, by the grace of God, to be Christ's disciple, to follow in the way of our Savior, to resist oppression and evil, to show love and justice, and to witness to the work and word of Jesus Christ as best you are able?

And do you promise, according to the grace given you, to grow in the Christian faith and to be a faithful member of the church of Jesus Christ, celebrating Christ's presence and furthering Christ's mission in all the world?

Here at the start of 2011, I ask, how are we living out our promises? Does the fact that we are baptized, that we are part of the Body of Christ make a difference in how we live our lives?

I am reminded of the powerful image of the protestant reformer Martin Luther during the months of hiding he endured in Wartburg Castle. Kept safe from those who would do him harm, but terribly anxious and lonely, he scribbled over and over on the desktop where he sat, "I am baptized. I am baptized. I am baptized."

Would that we all found such comfort and strength in our participation in that sacrament.

One commentator writes, "Remembering our baptism is closer to seeking equilibrium on a storm-tossed sea, getting our bearings, remembering who, and whose, we are."

And whose are we? We are the children of the living God, followers of the one who calls us to community, reaching out and offering Grace in new and surprising ways. We are part of

the promise to bring about justice, to share in the communion and community of God's people together.

Yet many of us are living like the members of Kyle's family, mistakenly believing we've done everything there is to do, learned all there is to learn. Aren't we done? we ask.

But none of us is ever truly finished. There are still more possibilities unfolding before us. And this includes your pastors. As I began this new year, I posted the following prayer on the wall by my desk as a reminder that there is always more ahead. It comes from the writers of the Living the Questions curriculum. It begins,

*O God,*

*Make me discontented with things the way they are in the world, and in my own life. Make me notice the stains when people get spilled on. Make me care about the slum child downtown, the misfit at work, the people crammed into the mental hospital, the men, women, and youth behind bars.*

*Jar my complacency, expose my excuses, get me involved in the life of my city and my world. Give me integrity once more, O God, as we seek to be changed and transformed, with a new understanding and awareness of our common humanity. Amen.*

This year, I plan to live out my baptism more fully. To rest in the promises of God, and to stretch out into the possibilities unfolding before me. To share in the ministry and mission of Jesus Christ, wherever that may take me. I don't know where 2011 will lead, but I am excited to find out.

In a long conversation, Pastor Nishioka sat down with Kyle and his parents. He shared the understanding that Jesus' baptism was the beginning of the remarkable journey that was to lead him to the cross and beyond. He shared his belief that we are all part of that journey throughout our lives. "Kyle's baptism and confirmation was not simply about his profession of faith," he explained, "it is about his continuing to grow in his understanding of what God is calling him to do as he lives out his identity as a child of God."

The next Sunday, Kyle and his family came to church and were warmly greeted. They even seemed a little relieved at the realization that the journey was not over, but was only beginning.

Friends, our journeys are not over either, no matter how long we have been traveling them. We each have new life offered to us each day, new ministries to pursue, and new possibilities unfolding before us all.

Let us walk this path together this year, and let us be surprised where the road may lead.

Amen.