

Isaiah 42:1-9

Matthew 3:13-17

Acts 10:34-43

“The voice of the Lord is a powerful voice;  
a voice of splendor.” AMEN!

Most of our world religions  
have a system of initiation,  
something like the term “second birth.”

The first birth also an initiation.

Initiation into the physical world.

A physical birth of breathing, eating, and  
a meeting of the other physical needs  
like shelter and partnerships in a community.

These things at the first birth,  
into the physical world, are required  
for our survival.

And we live, hopefully, in that first birth  
for a period of time.

Some people always stay there.

But, with most of the world religions then,  
after the first birth, there is a second birth.

A time when a person is drawn into  
deeper questions like,

what is life for?

Why am I here?

What is my, or your, purpose?

These deeper questions, hopefully then  
draw us into what might be called  
the second birth.

Today, with the baptism of Jesus we might  
be able to recognize that Jesus too experienced  
the initiation of second birth.

As most of you know, in Judaism at 13 for boys  
and 12 or 13 years old for girls,  
there's a special ceremony called  
the bar (for boys) mitzvah or  
bat (for girls) mitzvah.

These are the ages when it is understood  
that young people are able to begin to be  
held accountable for their actions.

Jesus did that when he went to the temple  
with his parents as a boy.

He went there asking questions and  
he listened to the teachers.

His parents were frantic, but when they

found Jesus he said to them,  
“Why were you searching for me when  
you should have known  
I’d be in my Father’s house.”

In that event, Jesus became aware of  
the ways he was now responsible for his actions.

He went through the Jewish initiation, we might say,  
but we don’t know what  
the teachers said or didn’t say.

Some accounts lead us to believe they  
had little to say to Jesus, or nothing at all, as  
they sat at his feet and listened to him teach.

We want to know but  
we don’t know what  
Jesus really knew. (Pause)

So, now we have this account,  
Jesus was around 30 years old, and

I can’t help but wonder if Jesus went out into  
that desert to find John, and the others there,  
because he needed a journey; an initiation.

Could it be that even Jesus needed a journey?

This is the question that is asked to us  
underneath the surface of our texts this morning:

How do they draw us into thinking of  
baptism in a different way?

For it is more than a ceremony;  
more than a chance for a lovely reception  
or family reunion.

They are all good things, don't think  
I am saying something otherwise.

But, I wonder if we perform the ceremony  
without taking into account  
the images of being reborn?

To find that it's more than food,  
new clothes, or a chance to see the baby  
and more about a confession of faith and  
an important part of the process  
in each of our journeys that move us  
to second birth. (Pause)

Jesus demonstrates things that are important.

The first thing for us to do is to  
go out into the desert, or wilderness,  
or nature.

Second birth initiations almost always happen in nature.

When one is alone and struck by

the wonder and awe of  
life and solitude.

When there's nothing but other animals or  
the wind to listen to.

When we come to grasp the aloneness and  
ponder what life means as you sit  
in a meadow or walk a trail.

“The voice of the Lord is a powerful voice,”  
the psalmist writes.

That voice confirmed and affirmed Jesus,  
on his journey.

But notice now that he was not alone.

Matthew described the coming of  
the Holy Spirit to be like a dove...  
but it wasn't a dove or any other bird really.

It's an author using a visual image  
to describe an invisible thing.

How else can one describe what  
happens at the second birth?

Metaphors must be used. (Pause)

There's another way for people to come

to this kind of initiation I am talking about.

That other way is through deep suffering.

Deep love and deep suffering  
brings one to second birth.

When we ignore these opportunities  
to come to second birth then one  
will always think life is only about sports,  
or money, or size of the house, or  
self gratification and we get stuck.

The journey is postponed because we  
were afraid to let it change us;  
envelop us; initiate us.

You see it, don't you?

Initiation begins in solitude and nature,  
but fulfill us in community, relationships,  
and affirmations.

What God affirmed to Jesus,  
God affirms to you...

“You are God's beloved daughter...  
You are God's beloved son...”

You are God's beloved child with whom  
God is well pleased.”

AMEN!