

TEXT: Galatians 3:23-29
THEME: We are all children of God
SUBJECT: Baptism
TITLE: Race, Status, Gender

Second Sunday after Pentecost
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Messiah Moravian
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“For as many of you as were baptized into the Anointed have clothed yourselves in the Anointed. There can be neither Judaeon nor Greek, there can be neither slave nor freeman, there cannot be male and female, for you are all *one* in the Anointed One Jesus.” (David Bentley Hart translation)

Cynthia Bourgeault hears her granddaughter singing along with the “Sesame Street” jingle, “One of these things is not like the other, one of these things doesn’t belong. Can you tell which thing is not like the others, by the time I finish this song?”

Cynthia realizes that as her granddaughter learns how a cat is not a dog, she is also absorbing the basic methodology of consciousness: perception through differentiation. Little does the granddaughter know that she will come to view the world, herself, and all others through this useful but ruthlessly isolating binary shorthand.

She will come to anchor her uniqueness, and hence her “specialness,” in what makes her different from everyone else rather than in what makes her *one* with everyone else. Given this way of understanding herself, she will inevitably experience herself in competition and potential conflict with other human beings, struggling to defend her “uniqueness” against all other competing uniquenesses.

We believe what makes us different is what matters. We identify our ourselves by race (Caucasian, African-American, Mexican, Chinese . . .), by gender (male, female, trans), by status (pretty, ugly; thin, fat, muscular, agile; smart, dumb; rich, poor). It is this initial mistake of taking what is accidental as essential that gives rise to experiences of pain, alienation, and guilt.

These are “artificial faces,” created by the basic perceptual tool we use to navigate reality. Our mental “operating system” is programmed to differentiation as its fundamental interpretive mode. It is unable to perceive or sustain what makes us one with everyone else.

Paul challenges this way of thinking. Baptism names a reality that precedes anything that might differentiate us from one another: we are all already children of God. Our true identity is given to us by God, named for us in our baptism. It takes us a lifetime to live into this reality, and then only with the help of a community of people also learning the truth that precedes all accidents of birth.

One brilliantly clear October evening, only a couple of months before his death, a hermit teacher and his student watched the fiery red sun sink beneath the jagged horizon line of the mountain ridge.

“Look!” the teacher suddenly exclaimed and pointed toward the east. The student turned toward the east and saw a perfect sliver of a crescent moon, brilliantly poised for its October debut, so delicate and perfectly suspended in the luminous night sky that it almost took the students breath away.

“Look again,” the teacher said. This time the student saw what the teacher was so fixedly pointing to. Behind the delicate sliver of a new moon was the perfect outline of the full moon, completely round and whole.

“What we have to be,” said the teacher, “is what we already are.” Yes, the journey in time is real. Yes, we must grow and change, and live into the truth, the full truth of our being. Yes, it takes faith to see that at the center of my being and yours is the image of God, whole and wholly reflecting the glory of God.

“Yesterday, in Louisville,” Merton wrote on March 19, 1958, “at the corner of 4th and Walnut I suddenly realized that I loved all the people and that none of them were, or, could be totally alien to me. As if waking from a dream - the dream of my separateness, of the ‘special’ vocation to be different.

“My vocation does not really make me different from the rest of men or put me in a special category except artificially; juridically. I am still a member of the human race - and what more glorious destiny is there for man, since the Word was made flesh and became too, a member of the Human Race!”

Eleanor Marian Waynick, Nora. In your baptism today we have named your destiny, to become who you already are: a child of God. We have promised to teach you this truth through word and deed.

Sometimes we will fail you, fail you in big and little ways, for we still cling to what makes us different, believing it makes us “special.” We still sing, “One of these things is not like the others, one of these things doesn’t belong.” Race, status, gender blind us to our essential unity.

We are growing into the truth that we are all one in the Anointed One. Sometimes you will catch a glimpse of this deeper reality within us and among us. Trust this deeper truth and know that as you grow into it you will discover who you already are. You will also discover the God who created you, who sustains you, who claims you as his own, who is your destiny as well as the source of your being.