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St. Timothy's Episcopal Church  
January 12, 2020

**1 Epiphany, Year A [RCL]:** Isaiah 42:1-9; Psalm 89:20-29; Acts 10:34-38;  
Matthew 3:13-17

**Title:** The Gift of Wings

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This is the first Sunday after the Epiphany – a Sunday on which, every year, we celebrate the baptism of Jesus. Though we have no baptisms scheduled this morning, this is one of the four Sunday's in the year when baptisms are especially appropriate.

It is, of course, in the case of infant baptism when a child is given her or his Christian name, marked as Christ's own, and received into the household of God. Baptism is also that moment in our lives when we are named a child of God; a citizen of the Kingdom of God; integrated, if you will, into the divine family.

If you are old enough you might recall the TV mini-series – Roots. The riveting drama that is Alex Haley's story of his search for his roots. We all need roots. We all need a sense of grounding. Some sense of wherein we derive our sense of who we are.

Hodding Carter, the Mississippi wise man, has said that there is a universal need to be socially constructed in a home and with people who believe you to be special and who express that specialness in countless ways over the course of our most impressionable years. Roots, says Carter, is that ground from where is formed a personal identity centered in a family, or a tribe, or a community where one is welcomed and appreciated.

But Carter says that there is another universal need in addition to having roots. And that is what he calls 'the gift of wings.' We need not only to have an identified 'home base,' but also to be given the tools and the encouragement to sprout wings and fly.

Baptism is our grounding in a Christian community of faith. Living in a community of faith is to be given the gift of wings.

But if this is true, what is the substance of the ground in which we as Christians take our nurture? And what is it we are called to do? And who are we called to be? Where are our wings to take us?

The answer, of course, to both questions is found in the person of Christ. The substance of our ground of being is that soil that Christ prepared for us. We are called to do those things Christ calls us to do. And we are called to be imitators of him. And we are called to go to the places he would have us go.

We as parents, God Parents, and the extended community of the faithful are called to nurture our children in Christ. And we are called to point to the things that Christ pointed to so that our children have a sense of direction – divinely inspired direction.

In the story of Christ's baptism in the Jordan at the hands of his cousin, John, we hear God saying, "This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased." In a few weeks we will hear God speak yet again, but this time the setting will not be the bank of a river, but rather on top of a mountain -- a mountaintop where Jesus will be transfigured. And God will say something that will sound *very similar* to what God said at the time of Christ's baptism. There on that mountain top once again God will say of Jesus, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased." But God will follow that proclamation with an instruction. God says, "Listen to him."

In summary, this is what we, in our baptism, are called to do. To listen to him. To take to heart all that Jesus has to say to us. And to incorporate those things into our lives. And it is not always easy. In fact, to incorporate Christ into our lives is almost nearly never easy. Because if we listen to Jesus, really listen, he often tells us hard things.

Jesus tells us that we are to not judge one another. Not easy.

Jesus tells us that we are to love one another. Not always easy.

Jesus tells us that we are forgive one another. Not easy.

Jesus tells us that we are foster peace, reject violence, and embrace love. Not always easy.

Jesus tells us we are to be generous in our sharing and in compassion. Not always easy.

Jesus tells us that you have heard it said, "An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth, but I tell you if someone strikes you on the one cheek offer the other." Not easy.

And know this: In saying you have heard it said, ‘an eye for an eye,’ Jesus was quoting from the Old Testament – the Old Testament of the law and the prophets of which he said he came not to destroy but to fulfill. But whenever Jesus utters the phrase, “But I tell you,” he was saying that some things in the Old Testament were but a foretaste of that which God would have you know, and do, and be. And that some of the things that you will encounter in the Old Testament then are trumped by Jesus, and so Jesus would have us come to an even higher understanding and a higher ethic. Jesus would have us not discount the teachings of the Old Testament, but rather build upon them. And so you get instructions like, ‘turn the other cheek’ – things that are not always easy.

Jesus also says we cannot worship both God and money. Not an easy teaching.

Jesus says not to be anxious about what you are to eat or wear. And he says do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Let the day’s own trouble be sufficient for today. Not always easy to do.

And Jesus would say many other things. And Jesus would have us pick up our cross and follow him. Not an easy thing to do.

But in all of this, and more, Jesus was calling us to be open and available to the Holy Spirit – that same Spirit that spoke words of affirmation at Jesus’ own baptism.

That same Spirit that spoke to Peter in a dream and instructed Peter that God’s blessings were for all the human race – not just his tribe.

That same Spirit that would speak to one Paul of Tarsus and call him to be God’s ambassador to the non-Jewish world. That same Spirit that called Saint Timothy to a life of missionary work under the guidance and tutelage of the apostle Paul.

That same Spirit that called Ghandi and a young preacher in Birmingham, Alabama to take on the cause of justice, but to do so not by violent means, but by turning the other cheek.

That same Spirit that would call a group of people in Calhoun, Georgia to create a program called The Volunteer Action Center where persons can get assistance with rental and utilities assistance so that by way of Christian witness, our neighbors who are cold can receive the fuel oil they need to be warm.

That same Spirit that inspires us to vow at our Baptism that we will proclaim by way of word and deed the Good News of Christ, and seek and to serve Christ in all persons, and to strive for justice and peace among all people.

Not always easy, but it is our calling. It is these things that we are called to do. And it is, by and through the grace of God, that we do any of these things. And we can only do these things and we certainly can only do them in joy and confidence as we have prepared our hearts to hear the voice of the Spirit.

We are not many called to be disciples whose deeds are of such universal import as to cause our names to be recognized around the world as is the case with the Apostle Paul and Martin Luther King, or Saint Timothy. But if not called to greatness, we are all called to be greatly open to this Spirit.

I close with this. Writing of the Holy Spirit, Frederick Beechler said, “I do not believe that it matters what you call this power – the Spirit of God is only one of its names – but what I think does matter, and matters greatly, is that we open ourselves to it, that we move in the direction that it seeks to move us, the direction of fuller communion with itself and with one another.”

By God’s grace may it be so in all our lives.

Amen.