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Mansfield Center, CT
January 8, 2012: The Baptism of Jesus / 1st Sunday after Epiphany
Scripture Texts: 2 Kings 5: 1-19a; Mark 1: 4-11

Please pray with me: May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer.

We have wet, soggy, dirty scripture lessons today. Did you notice that?

Our world is wet, soggy and filled with dirt. Sometimes dirty dirt – filled with harmful stuff; sometimes good dirt, that makes plants grow healthy and strong. Sometimes yucky water that would be nasty to drink or cook with; sometimes bubbly, exciting and fun water that’s refreshing and lovely.

Mix them together – dirt and water – and what do you get? Mud... yep. Mud. Muddy water. Sloppy, squishy dirt. Like, have you ever gone swimming where the water *looks* clear and nice, but when you get a little ways out from shore the bottom of the lake or river is muddy and it squishes between your toes and mud clouds billow up, and you can’t see what you’re stepping on and it feels slimy?

That’s kind of like the Jordan River, actually. The Jordan River, the place where General Naaman bathed and was healed, and where John the Dunker baptized crowds and crowds of people, and Jesus, too.

The Jordan River.... Who has been there? What is it like? It is wide and shallow. And slow moving. That means.... Mud.

How can it be that water that’s all churned up by crowds, and M-U-D muddy, how could that heal, or wash people’s sins away, and be a sign and symbol of a new start with God?

Imagine, Naaman coming out of the water after dunking 7 times... his uniform soaked, decayed leaves in his pants pockets and sand in his socks – he was a MESS. And yet, he was healed.

And Jesus, baptized by John the Baptist *after* all those people has already been baptized.... There was a whole crowd on the shore of the Jordan River that day, standing in line. I think Jesus just got in line, too. John the Baptist was busy – *everyone* from the countryside and from the city was coming to the Jordan River to be baptized, to have their sins washed away – sort of like the process that makes for a fresh start at New Years – to help them *make some promises* to God and to themselves and maybe to their family and friends: this year, I’m going to do better; I’m going to be kinder; I’m going to....

Well, what New Years resolutions did you make? Save more money? Study harder? Lose weight? Say, “I’m sorry” to someone whose feelings you’ve hurt? Be nice to people you don’t know?

There’s Jesus, tired and sweaty and dirty-dusty from his long walk from Galilee, standing at the back of the line, waiting his turn... John the Baptist says

Next

Next

Next

Next

Jesus gets closer to the front of the line with each

Next

Next

Eventually, he's close enough that John recognizes him

Next

Next

And there he is, and he leans back, and goes under the water and comes up and...

He's still dirty – *wet* dirty this time. All the sweat and road dust – maybe *some* of that has been washed away, but our Jesus has picked up some of the yucky stuff that's in the muddy Jordan River, so Jesus *may* be cleaner, but barely.

And suddenly there's a voice from heaven saying,

You know – say it with me.... *"You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased."*

Later in this service, right at the end, Pastor Joe and I – with the help of some children, will mix up a bunch of water. It's Mansfield's best tap water, which means it's not yucky, unlike the water found in other parts of the world that isn't fit to drink. But it's been put in bowls that may be a bit dusty, though they were rinsed this morning. Those bowls of water have been sitting out in pews and on windowsills for a couple of hours now, maybe a bug – like one John the Baptist would eat for lunch – has fallen into a bowl of water, maybe a dust mite, maybe a finger that's not quite clean as taken a dip... we're going to mix water together that *looks* clean and proper, but maybe isn't quite sterilized in reality. And we're going to share that water with you in hopes that it reminds you of your baptism, if you're baptized, or that it feels refreshing and clean if you're not, prompting thoughts of new starts, whether or NOT you're baptized.

Here's the essence of the new start that's given to Naaman, in his healing, and to us through Jesus' baptism, through his willingness to get into the muddy water with us, to stand in line with all who hope for a new start, to put himself under – under water, into the chaos, through the birth-waters breaking forth for new life – new life as God's beloved, in whom God is pleased.

This water will not make you clean. Sinless. Perfect.

It is, however, the water in which your full humanity is blessed by God, and through which God says, *"You are my child, a beloved, in whom I am well pleased."* YOU, Beloveds. Especially YOU.

Thanks be to God, Amen.