

## Pastor Roy's Sermon from January 13, 2013

Isaiah 43:1-7, Psalm 29, Acts 8:14-17, Luke 3:15-17, 21-22

What are the wildest places on earth? Anywhere in or on the ocean without a large vessel. *Dessert* areas. Tops of *high mountains*. Deep forests in *hard to reach places*. The middle of a *hurricane, blizzard or sand storm*. There is wildness in a *severe drought* as has been affecting the northern plains. There is a wildness about our *climate* in general which we do not fully understand and certainly are powerless to control—though we clearly influence it with our behaviors and choices. There is plenty of wildness if we take time to observe, think about it, and experience it. There is even a kind of wildness in each *relationship* which we share—*family, friends, neighbors, strangers, other nations, and people groups within our own land*.

We don't often think directly of wildness because we have *so tamed* and dominated our world. We live in *comfort*—*rarely are we cold or hot or even wet that we aren't drying ourselves off*. *We do not lack for food*. *We do not walk for our water*. *We do not search for wood to fuel the fire for our next meal*. We flip switches. We work and have worked to provide for retirement. We pay bills. We drive our cars. But life has not been so easy for others if we gaze into the past or into the lives of other peoples alive today who do not share our convenience.

But in the end, *neither the planet nor our God* will be tamed by our efforts. *The wildness is out there whether we acknowledge it or not*. In fact, I think some of our frustrations grow out of the fact that we forget that we live in a wild world and serve a wild God. We expect to be in control. The problem is that we sometimes forget that God reigns rather than our own preferences and conveniences. **The power at work in creation is the God who creates--giving and shaping life with never-ending goodness and mercy.** God's wildness is goodness and mercy.

We live in a world criss-crossed with humanity and humanity's influence. Sometimes we lose sight of God because of all the people and all of our taming powers. **In our desire to control the wildness around us, we sometimes cut ourselves off from God and mutual relationships with God's creation.** True communion cannot occur where there is domination and unequal relationships.

*Spending time listening to God's Spirit and creation reveals to us that we are not in a position of domination*. We can commune with God and with all of creation. The result of all of this is humility which leads to mutual relationships.

We connect with God's goodness and mercy through our relationships with one another and creation.

*This is all about prayer! Prayer is communion with God. Prayer is learning our place in the wilderness--humbly taking the time to observe God at work, to allow ourselves to freely fall into the mercy of God which is all around us*. Psalm 29 observes our place within the wild creation of God.

God's wildness gives life freely and receives it back, whether it be the breathing of animals or of the trees, in germination/birth and in death. This is the big picture of God's Spirit moving over the land and water—the full wideness of God's mercy giving and receiving. Nothing is lost. Will live in a global give and take and it is the Spirit who leads and guides.

Jesus gives himself to the Spirit in baptism. The Spirit is with the water in the Jordan flowing over his

body. The Spirit waits for Jesus as he prays. The Spirit is with the water in the sky as a dove descending.

Jesus' baptism and our baptism is a confession of openness to the Spirit—whatever God is doing, wherever God is leading. The Spirit is God's communion of wildness to humanity and creation.

**Jesus' baptism is the inauguration of God's reign of mercy. Here is the one who is open to God's Spirit of mercy. He will share it with those who will receive it. It will be as water for the thirsty, a fire which burns, a wind which blows newness and hope. “You are my son, the beloved; with you I am well pleased.”**

Our baptism is a reminder that we live in a wild land with a wild God. Baptism is where we give ourselves and our children over into the hands of a wild God. Yes, it is frightening, but all of life is filled with chances and changes. We don't like all the possibilities. They don't seem pleasant. But the promise of God comes with baptism. The promise that we are not alone in this wildness. The Grace of the Creating One who is giving us life today will continue to hold us in communion. We will not be abandoned, even if our experience is as desolate as Jesus'.

How do we experience the presence of God? Our faith leads us into the presence of God. Faith which we glean from the Scriptures and the saints all around us in this place. Saints in the present, saints from the past. They are here in mystery and bodily presence.

We commune with God in prayer. We give God our concerns. We learn through silence, though shutting down the never ending conversations in our heads which go in endless circles again and again, rarely if ever turning up new thoughts and possibilities—we wait in solitude which beckons us on in communion with God clearing out the cobwebs in our heads so that we might be united with our sisters and brothers and all of creation.

Jesus prayed. Jesus was led by the Spirit into life and death. May we pray and learn the same quiet communion. Faith is a great challenge. If you want to deepen your faith, do so not by turning on a religious TV or radio program. Set aside time to listen to God in quietness. Yes, take your burdens and give them to the Spirit, but also learn the very difficult practice of sitting with God in silence. And if you wish to talk about what you hear and experience in that silence, I am here to listen. There are others in this room that will do the same. We are in this together.

Thanks be to God. Amen.