



Grain

“Thunder rollin’, lightnin’ flashin’/ But right through the middle of it I go dashin’/ Goes to show how far I’ll go for you/ If you want me to”.

—Roger Miller

Field

⁹ In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. ¹⁰ And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. ¹¹ And a voice came from heaven, “You are my Son, the Beloved; ^[d] with you I am well pleased.” Mark 4:9-12

Thoughts by Pastor Peter Heide

At the beginning of Advent, we heard the words from Isaiah 64, “O that you would tear open the heavens and come down.” This week these words are fulfilled.

Before I was blind, I remember, as a child, a picture of Jesus’ baptism on my Sunday School room wall. The water is serene. John is standing in the water looking at Jesus who walks toward the shore. In a cloudless sky, a dove descends over Jesus.

This image sufficed until I got to seminary. Having translated this text myself, I was no longer satisfied. I started interviewing people who were blind and asked them to describe the day: what time of year it was; what was the weather like, what they smelled when they heard this story. What I got was a description that had nothing to do with the pretty picture from Sunday School. I heard of oppressively hot days, storms and tornados, lightning with the smell of ozone in the air, wind blowing, torrential rain and thunder—lots of thunder. One said, “I don’t know how bad the storm was, but I wish I could have had a tape recorder there that day.” They heard the heavens being torn apart—the boundary between heaven and earth being destroyed. In this boundary-breaking event, they heard the answer to the prayer of Isaiah 64.

Accustomed to the images that have been prepared for us, we overlook the radicality of Jesus’ baptism in Mark. In God declaring Jesus’ identity, the world has changed. The kingdom of God has seismically shifted, and the Son of God walks among us. It is radical! It changes the world creating a spirit-driven wilderness time of new formation. We live in the world where the heavens are torn open. God comes down to live among us. We are called to consider the implications of the new creation possibilities that lie before us. In the torrential rains of baptism, with God’s word of claiming, with the sign of the cross upon us and sealed by the Holy Spirit, are we ready to hear God’s creation words of goodness, to enter our wilderness time of new creation? Can we hear our names among the names of the disciples?

Are we ready for the radical love of God that breaks down the barriers between heaven and earth, between liberals and conservatives, men and women, gay and straight, and from those cosmetic differences we call race? Are we ready, because, on the other side of this storm, on the other side of the wilderness, is the promised land of heaven and earth inclusion where the Son always shines? Happy Monday!

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Many Blessings upon you,

Pastor Peter