

**Searching Out God's Spirit**  
**written by Rev. Mel Martinez**  
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The picture of Jesus' baptism is one of my favorite in the Bible. The vision in my head is a conglomeration of the beautiful colors of the best works of art, and the costumes of "Jesus Christ Superstar". You'd be amazed how well Michelangelo and Andrew Lloyd Weber get along.

I imagine the incoming Jesus perhaps arriving slowly, weaving through a large crowd gathered at the shoreline listening to John. He listens to John's sermon all the way to the water. Now, only John who knows who Jesus is. He is alone in that. Up to this point John has been preaching, sermonizing loudly, wildly, full of passion. That is what John was born to do, and he can't NOT do it. And so when Jesus appears it had to of been a shock to those who are on the shoreline and watching when John submits to this man they don't know.

Jesus simply enters the water comes right up to John in expectation of receiving the baptismal blessing. But John, in awe and perhaps not just a little fear, tells Jesus that he is not worthy. "I should be baptized by you.", says the exasperated John.

Now this is an experience of Christ I think we can all embrace. That feeling of not being worthy. For in the face of God in the face of Christ we find ourselves lacking. Or at least we have been taught that we are lacking. We certainly are in a place, are a creation, that ought find ourselves in reverence. But we forget that we are part of the creation that God calls good.

How many of you have felt unworthy of the gift of grace from God?

It's that very sense of unworthiness that kept the disciples from understanding for so long during Jesus's ministry. It's that perception of ourselves that keeps us from being whole, and healthy in our service to God. It's that judgment that we have received down from generation after generation that human beings are simply not worthy.

And yet, Jesus' very existence, God incarnate, is the testimony against our self-prejudice. That is never more clear than in the person of John at the moment of Jesus's baptism.

When I was a Girl Scout growing up, there were lots of rules we learned about taking care of ourselves in the wilderness. Remember John is a wilderness guy. He does nothing but live in and on that which is wild. In the Girl Scouts, one of the things we learned was not to do things alone if we could at all help it. From building a fire to swimming to hiking to camping...it was always better to have a buddy.

Buddies were available to us as camp troops in almost every activity. Our counselors would decide which activity we would accomplish for the day and then begin to break us up into buddies to accomplish that task. Now, given that I was always willing to do whatever the counselor said, and given that the REASON I was always willing was that I always had a crush on said counselor, I'd aim to find a way to be the last girl

standing...because the last girl paired would inevitably be paired with the counselor.

As we all gathered 'round for our pairing – ones and twos chosen by the counselor at the head of the group, I'd slowly, not too obviously (I thought), inch my way to the very back of the group. I couldn't be too obvious, or the counselor stationed at the back would think I didn't want to go at all and might retire me to making friendship bracelets or something gross like that.

I'd stand back just long enough for the ones and twos to finish when the question came, "Does everybody have a buddy?" I'd slowly raise my hand, looking forlorn...after all, the counselor had forgotten me...and watch a look of sympathy pass across the counselor's face. "Ok, Mel, you can come up here with me." Success! With excitement and bearing the powerful kid glares of the other girls who had a crush on the counselor, I'd bound up to the front of the group.

Now, I did all this with a very strong sense that I was not worthy of much of anything other than the scuffed knees and bruises I got. I'd learned piety early and became very good at it...that sense of total unworthiness that I embraced as truth, all the while punishing myself with awful self-talk and jabbing judgmental daggers at others. After all, we cannot be genuinely kind and graceful to others if we are not first kind and graceful to ourselves.

But in the midst of said unworthiness, a longing to be with that wonderful guide, who would always be gentle, who would walk me through learning things I wasn't necessarily gifted at, who would give me opportunity to be proud of myself and feel like I

was leading too, even if for just a moment...that longing was so strong, I'd do anything to be there.

John is desperately trying to get put back in the crowd by Jesus. He knows who Jesus is – our Greatest Guide, Wonderful Counselor, Savior of our wholeness – and he wants nothing more than to be put back in the buddy system...paired up with Jesus...and in the place to learn and serve him. But Jesus astonishes John and tells John that he must baptize Jesus. John must remain the leader until Jesus has received that cleansing blessing.

Perhaps you've heard tell that Jesus did this under God's instruction because the people gathered needed to see the miracle of the dove. That's one way of looking at it...that Jesus' baptism wasn't a cleansing so much as it was an act meant to bring about a bigger testimony. But I'll ask you to consider that Jesus' baptism was exactly what it was for John and anyone else gathered at the shoreline that day. It was a supplication to God, a voluntary cleansing of anything in his humanness that he had said or done that might have separated him from total attention and devotion to God. His baptism was his willingness to honor his humanness...and our humanness, too...and know that to be human is not to be God. That is salvific for all of the human beings around him, for in his act, Jesus claimed his human nature and was redeemed...and so are we all redeemed when we are willing.

Jesus needed John to do this amazing redemption task. Jesus needed a buddy, and then surrounded himself with buddies through the rest of his life's ministry. Truth be told, Jesus continues to use a buddy in these thousands of years later.

When we are on a journey of learning and of self-discovery...which we all are...we have to remember that we're not alone. We are the body of Christ, buddies to Christ's work on earth. And we are completely and totally worthy of the task.

That doesn't mean we won't forget our buddy and go off on our own...but know that our buddy is tracking us and will find us.

We might decide to do something that our buddy would rather we not do...but our buddy will be faithful to accompany us through the consequences of our actions.

When on this Scavenger Hunt over these next few weeks, use this time to examine your life. The twists and turns, the clues along the way, the importance of our decisions versus our willingness to cooperate with God...see the points at which you've been in line with your buddy Christ, and when you haven't. Try your best to no repeat the times you went at life on your own.

Christ is our most important buddy in this...we all get to be the counselor's companion...but those around you today are those extra buddies that help you along the way. Look into each other's eyes. Smile at one another. Make a funny face. Whether you've known one another for 40 years or for an hour, we are equally the community of buddies for each of you.

In our Scripture in Acts this morning, word that the people of Samaria have received the word of God and been baptized has reached the Apostles. Peter and John are sent to them to open the floodgates of the Holy Spirit among them.

This Christian body, this faithful community who follows the example of Christ, has always relied on buddies. The path of

Christ – the Way to God – is not accomplished alone. Your Peter and John is among us, your buddy Christ is within you and around you, and with God's Spirit bestowed on you, you will become a buddy for someone else.

Our new Praise and Worship song today says in the chorus..."I will run to you, to your words of truth, not by might, not by power, but by the Spirit of God, "Yes, I will run the race 'til I see your face, Oh let me live in the glory of your grace." The glory of God's grace is found in your heart and the hearts of those of faith who guide you and whom you guide. Embrace that system of friendship...the buddy system...for your journey ahead. It's in Christ's example that we follow, and among disciples that we receive the Spirit to continue on. Amen.