

Rev. Dr. Yugo Suzuki's Sermon

1/11/10     **“Why Was Jesus Baptized?”   Mark 1:9-11**

Jesus was baptized by John the Baptist in the river Jordan.

At that time, the political and cultural atmosphere of Palestine was extremely volatile. The Jews were under the oppressive government of the Roman Empire. The Romans insisted that Caesar, the emperor of Rome, not the God of Abraham and Moses, was a true God.

What was going on in the village of Nazareth where Jesus was growing up?

Every day as he worked as a carpenter, Jesus witnessed so much misery. He saw men and women plagued with skin diseases. He saw children emaciated and starved. He saw adults suffering from mental disorders. He saw wives abused by husbands. He saw prostitutes stoned to death.

Where was God in all this? This was the question Jesus must have asked many a time. Why doesn't God do something? Why is he silent in the face of this awful situation?

At his baptism, Jesus received from God an answer to these life and death questions. What he received was a revolutionary understanding of God.

God was sharing the burden of the poor and oppressed. God understood the pain of the deranged and the despair of the despised. God was never absent; nor was he ever silent. God was a God of suffering love.

So at his baptism, Jesus surrendered himself to this God and accepted his call to be the perfect instrument of divine love. And God blessed him for that.

That is the meaning of Mark that was chosen for today's text. “Suddenly the heavens were opened to him and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, ‘This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased.’”

What does all this say to us today? It says to us that although it often does not appear to be so, even in our darkest hour, God is with us, encouraging us to live lovingly and joyfully in a world where hatred seems to overwhelm love.

This God of suffering love transformed Martin Luther King from a quiet introspective child to a courageous leader of racial reconciliation. This God of suffering love transformed Uchimura Kanzo from a nationalistic son of a samurai to a disciple of Christ who never tired of preaching, “I for Japan, Japan for the world, the world for Christ, and all for God.” This God of suffering love transformed Toyohiko Kagawa from a boy plagued with inferiority complex to a loving and courageous pastor who spoke up for the despised people in the city of Kobe.

Make no mistake. The God who called Martin Luther King, Uchimura Kanzo, and Toyohiko Kagawa is calling us today, even us who often display the lack of love and the shallowness of faith in daily life.

Make no mistake. The Father of Jesus Christ loves us; he encourages us; he transforms us. Can we think of anything that is more wonderful than this?

Thanks be to God.