

## SERMON

January 13, 2008

1 Epiphany

“We’re blessed so we can be a blessing”

A few nights ago I had a dream.

I dreamt I was in the chancel of a church  
with other people and some children.

There were some large boulders there, covered with wet moss.

A child was climbing on one of the boulders and asked me,  
"Do you do anointing in your church?"

I said, "Yes, we do anoint people. Here's how we do it."

I ran my hand through some water on a rock  
and reached up and traced a cross on his forehead and said,  
"I anoint you in the Name of the Father  
and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit."

That seemed to satisfy him and he ran off to play.

I'm not sure what the dream signified exactly,  
but I wonder if the little boy didn't represent my inner child  
that needed some healing or some kind of blessing.

I think my dream was in some way about baptism.

It had a lot of baptismal associations.

Water from the rock,  
being in the holy place,  
anointing, healing.

Baptism is a powerful act and has strongly symbolic meaning for us.

Through our baptism we are strengthened,  
anointed, healed, filled with God's Spirit,  
and made children of God.

In today's Gospel lesson, Jesus was baptized in the Jordan River.

When he came up out of the water,  
 the heavens were opened  
 and the Holy Spirit descended on him like a dove,  
 and a voice from heaven said,  
 “This is my Son, the Beloved,  
 with whom I am well pleased.”

Right after his baptism, Jesus began doing works of power.  
 Because he was anointed with the Holy Spirit,  
 he was given power to heal and teach  
 and do the works of God.  
 It was a major moment in Jesus’ life, a turning point.

Our reading from the Acts of the Apostles this morning  
 is a speech given by Peter about the basic message of Jesus.  
 It says, “God anointed Jesus with power,  
 and he went about healing and doing good.

They killed him by hanging him on a tree,  
 but God raised him from the dead and he appeared to us.

He commanded us to preach to everyone  
 that he is judge of everyone  
 and he offers forgiveness to all who ask in his name.”  
 That’s the basic teaching of the early church about Jesus.

Anointing is a kind of blessing.  
 When we baptize a person,  
 we anoint them with oil and say,  
 “You are sealed by the Holy Spirit and marked as Christ’s own forever.”

That’s a blessing!  
 We are blessed so that we can be a blessing.  
 We are called,  
 chosen, blessed,

so that we can go out and be a blessing to others.

Our baptism is our blessing.

When we're baptized, we're chosen, we're blessed,  
and we're sent out to be a blessing.

The world tells us that we are not blessed.

The world tells us that we're worth something  
only if we can prove it by our accomplishments  
or our looks or our money.

But God tells us that we are blessed.

We are God's beloved children.  
Even when we fall and sin,  
God forgives us when we repent  
and God gives us a fresh start.

We're blessed so that we can be a blessing.

I think there are a lot of people out there who need a blessing.  
One of the most important things we do as Christians  
is to bring a blessing to other people.

I don't mean necessarily that we're going to go around saying

"God bless you," all the time (although that's not such a bad idea either).

But I mean that we bless people  
by leaving them with the feeling that they are blessed,  
that they are worthwhile,  
that they are children of God.

There are a lot of ways to give a blessing.

Sometimes we give a blessing to someone just by listening patiently.

Sometimes we give a blessing by our smile,  
by our encouragement,  
by our acceptance of the other person for who they are.

The writer and teacher Henri Nouwen tells a story about blessing.

He was a very successful writer and teacher,  
 when he decided to leave that life  
 and go live in L'Arche, a Christian community  
 that combined people who were disabled and  
 people who were not yet disabled.

There were people with mental and physical handicaps there  
 and Henri said he learned valuable lessons from them.

One day before worship, a woman came to him and said,

“I want a blessing.”

Henri didn't know exactly what to do,

but he reached up and made a cross on her forehead.

She said, “Not like that.

That didn't work.”

He said, “What do you mean? I gave you a blessing.”

She said, “No. I want a real blessing.”

Henri felt helpless,

but after the service he called people to gather around this woman

and he said, “Brenda needs a blessing.”

She came up to him and laid her head on his chest,

and he wrapped her up in his arms

and he allowed himself to feel God's love for her, and he said,

“Brenda, you are a good person.

God loves you.

You're so important to us here,

and we love you, all of us.

You are God's beloved child.”

And when she looked up at him, he could see that she felt blessed.

People need to be blessed.

We need to be blessed.

God blesses each of us and says to us.  
“You are God’s beloved child.”

We are blessed.

And we take that out into the world  
and we share our blessing with others.