

*4John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. 5And people from the whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem were going out to him, and were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. 6Now John was clothed with camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. 7He proclaimed, "The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the thong of his sandals. 8I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."*

*9In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. 10And 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. 11And a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased."*

Have you ever felt as if God has something special planned for you? Not just getting up every morning to follow the pattern of the day before but something special. The experiences you have been given, the people you have known, the thoughts that have filled your mind and spirit could be just an accident – random - pointless. But do you have that sense that what has happened in you will enable you to do and be what no other can do and be?

Maybe it was like that for Jesus during the hidden years.

In Sunday School I learned there were eighteen years of Jesus earthly life that are hidden from us. There is the story of when Jesus was twelve, visiting the temple, staying behind because as he said he must be about his Father's business. Then there is nothing until Jesus is thirty. Not a single word tells us what Jesus thought and did and felt, where he went, whom he knew, what he learned.

I assume Jesus studied the scriptures, as he read, as he heard, Jesus must have learned to see himself there. From stories his mother told of the events before his birth, at his birth, after his birth he must have learned that God had something special planned for Jesus.

Yet for eighteen years there was only waiting, growing, praying.

Then came the moment that God chose. Along with so many people Jesus went out to the Jordan where John the Baptist was baptizing. With the many Jesus was baptized and just as he was coming out of the water, Jesus saw the heavens torn apart, and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. And a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved, with you I am well pleased."

Maybe the sight of the Spirit sent Jesus mind to the passage from Isaiah, "Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen in whom my soul delights; I have put my spirit upon him; he will bring forth justice to the nations. He will not cry or lift up his voice, or make it heard in the street; a bruised reed he will not break and a dimly burning wick he will not quench, he will faithfully bring forth justice. He will not grow faint or be crushed until he has established justice in the earth."

Maybe Jesus remembered this word, and knew that now was the time.

Or maybe he recalled the word for the king in Psalm 2: "You are my son; today I have begotten you. Ask of me, and I will make of the nations your heritage, and the ends of the earth your possession."

Whatever was in Jesus' mind in that moment we know the spirit that descended sent his life in a new direction, into the wilderness where he was tempted by Satan and depended on the angels of God for what he needed.

Then after forty days the Spirit sent him to people, calling people to live under God's rule and authority in their day to day life.

From his baptism until his death on the cross, a time scholars have estimated to be about three years, we see Jesus doing what God prepared for him to do. Being the servant who did not quench a dimly burning wick, Jesus was gentle with the people who were nearly crushed. One by one he lifted their burdens from them, freeing the lame to walk, the blind to see, setting those imprisoned in brokenness free.

Jesus fulfilled the promises God made through Isaiah, "I have given you as a covenant to the people, a light to the nations, to open the eyes that are blind,, to bring the prisoners from the dungeon, from prison those who sit in darkness."

And then at last Jesus fulfilled God's greatest promise through Isaiah: "He was despised and rejected by others, a man of suffering and acquainted with infirmity. Surely he has borne our infirmities and carried out diseases, yet we accounted him stricken, struck down by God and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, crushed for your iniquities, upon him was the punishment that made us whole. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have all turned to our own way, and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all."

It all began at Jesus baptism when the special work that God had prepared for Jesus was lived for all the world to see.

And that is where God's special work prepared for you begins too.

For the call to be servant of God in this world did not belong only to Jesus but to you his follower also. You are called to Jesus' gentleness, not breaking bruised reeds but supporting them. You are called to be the light of God and of Jesus for everyone who sits in darkness, bringing the light of the love and forgiveness of God to them. You are called to bring God's justice. Not to grow faint or be crushed by the enormous challenge of being a person of peace in the middle of shouting and shoving, but like Jesus to give yourself for others.

When you were baptized this special life as ambassador for God was given to you.

Every day God gives you a purpose, not to pursue your own interests, climbing over your neighbors in the survival of the fittest, but conforming your life to Christ - trusting in God as Jesus trusted, even when the wilderness seems full of Satan's beasts, trusting that God will send the messengers you need to feed you. You are called to trust that God will provide you even if life itself should be stripped from you.

And do you know what I say to all of that? I can't. I can't be gentle like Jesus, or trust like Jesus or forgive like Jesus or love like Jesus.

And do you know what God answers?

Yes you can. Here is my Spirit.

The very Spirit that was in Jesus is in you. The Spirit that was given Jesus in his baptism, God gave to you in your baptism.

And with that Spirit God gives you power and faith and hope to be all that Jesus is. In life and in death, God's servant.

Hear God's word not spoken to you: "Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen in whom my soul delights; I have put my spirit upon you. You will not cry or lift up your voice or make it heard in the street; a bruised reed you will not break and a dimly burning wick you will not quench; you will faithfully bring forth justice. You will not grow faint or be crushed until you have established justice in the earth. I have given you as a covenant to the people, a light to the nations, to open the eyes that are blind, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon, from prison those who sit in darkness."

Body of Christ, this is God's word to you. Live it. Amen.