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*Worship Service*

Grace and peace be with you my brothers and sisters, in the name of Jesus Christ who calls to us from the future and bears it among us today. Amen.

“The next day...”

That's how the gospel reading for today begins. “The next day...” So, before you can really listen to what comes next you have to ask what just happened. This seems like a question we can relate to here at Salem this morning. What did just happen? We're here at church the morning after an extraordinary ordination, attended by hundreds of people from across the city and around the nation. This time yesterday you were setting up extra chairs and preparing to host a huge celebration – which you did very well, thank you very much. We gathered together in this space to be reminded of our baptism – the waters of God's impartiality that hold us together and make one family out of all of us – and to set apart for public ministry Pastor Jen Nagel. It was an extraordinary day for you, Salem – and for the entire Church. And now it is “the next day.”

In the scriptures what has just happened is that the authorities from Jerusalem have come out to assess what John the Baptist is doing out in the wilderness. To observe his baptisms in the Jordan River, and to ask him who he thinks he is. This is becoming a theme, eh? Ministry is happening outside the walls of power and, as Pastor Davis reminded us yesterday, Jerusalem is going to want an explanation. Probably good for us to notice as well the humanity of that response. Yesterday we heard about how the early Christian church in Jerusalem was calling Peter to account for his baptism of the gentile Cornelius and his family; today we hear about the Jewish temple authorities calling John to account for his baptisms in the wilderness. There is something powerful happening in the waters of baptism – an ancient practice that the Christian church inherited from its Jewish roots and re-imagined as sign not of purity, but of belonging, which is why Peter and John are questioned by the authorities in their respective leadership – people want to know *who* they think belongs inside their community. We want to know who belongs here.

So... “the next day.” I thought it was just inspired that the texts used at Jen's ordination yesterday were the same texts we heard last Sunday for the festival of the Baptism of Our Lord. Actually, my first reaction was to think, “you totally copped out!” Do you know how long some pastors spend deliberating on which texts to use for their ordination? Do

you use the call passage from Jeremiah 1, “before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations.” Or is that a little presumptuous? Maybe Isaiah 61, “the Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me; God has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and release to the prisoners.” Or maybe that’s just a little too messianic? But Jen brings us all together for an ordination deferred almost a decade, and then she uses texts recycled from last Sunday? Jeez! Show a little effort.

But, of course she did – or whoever made that call did – they were the perfect texts for an extraordinary ordination. From Isaiah, “here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights...” (Isa 42:1); and from Acts, “I truly understand that God shows no partiality...”; and then, from Matthew, the story of the baptism of our Lord, another extraordinary setting apart where the rules of who will consecrate whom are turned inside out. John says to Jesus, “I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?” And Jesus replies, “let it be so now; for it is proper for us in this way to fulfill all righteousness.” It is proper – Jesus says – for us to turn things on their head, to defy expectation, in order that the righteousness of God, which we are always discovering is so much larger, so much wider, so much more graceful and merciful and beautiful and generous than we’ve ever been led to believe, might be fulfilled.

Those were the texts for last Sunday, and for yesterday. Now it is “the next day.”

A couple of things happen on “the next day” that I think are important for us to notice. The first is that it inspires testimony. The second is that it inspires discipleship.

The gospel of John remembers the story a little differently than the gospel of Matthew we heard yesterday. In Matthew’s gospel Jesus comes to John to be baptized and they have a little conversation before the fact to discuss the significance of what they’re about to do. But here, today, in John’s gospel we hear the Baptist saying, “I myself did not know him; but I came baptizing with water for this reason, that he might be revealed to Israel,” and then he testifies, “I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him... and I have seen and have testified that this is the Child of God.”

Jesus enters the waters and is revealed to be a child of God. That, we come to understand, is the function of baptism – to reveal the truth about who we are, who we all are, children of God, all of us. Remember, this gospel – the gospel of John – in fact earlier in this very same chapter, is the one that begins “to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave the power to become children of God...” (John 1:12). The waters of baptism do for Jesus then what they do for us, they reveal us for who we really are – children of the same God, branches of the same tree, held by waters that flow from the same source. In response to this revelation, John testifies, “I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove...”

Well, people of Salem, I am here to tell you – in fact, I and all the other visitors in this room who joined with you yesterday in laying our hands on Pastor Nagel and

consecrating her for ordained ministry in the church, we are all here to tell you that as we worshipped together yesterday, as we assembled and were sprinkled with baptismal waters and heard the good news of God preached from the pulpit and were fed at the wide table of God's welcome, *we* saw the Spirit descend – not just on your pastor, but on all of you, on all of us, we – the living body of Christ, the church, ordinary people made holy by God. We are here to testify to you that we saw it. It was real. And we traveled from great distances, many of us, so that we can return to our homes and tell them what we have seen. We saw it. It was real.

This testimony is so important. Now that we are living in “the next day” people are going to want to know what happened here yesterday. Sometimes they're going to ask you, and sometimes they're going to decide for themselves – even if they weren't here to see it for themselves. After Pastor Jen Rude was extraordinarily ordained last November another group of Lutherans took to writing about her ordination using phrases like, “the so-called ordination of Ms. Jen Rude” – not Pastor Jen Rude, but Ms. Some people will do that, try to undermine the radical welcome of the baptismal waters that you have unleashed here at Salem by eroding the credibility of your pastor. But we were here, we saw what happened, we are witnesses who can and will testify to the power and the presence of the Spirit of God that is moving in this place. Not just in and through your pastor – but in and through all of you. It is all of you together that make up the church. It is all of us together that make up the church. We don't even quite get it ourselves, just how wide the circle of God's care is, but we are learning – it is all of us together. God was revealed in all of us together, here, yesterday. I will take that testimony back to Chicago and share it with the people of St. Luke's Lutheran Church of Logan Square; and Jim and Bruce will take that testimony back to San Francisco, California; and Amalia will take it back to Decorah, Iowa. We will tell the truth about you, and you will tell the truth about us, and we will be revealed by the waters of our baptism for who we are – children of God, family together, all of us.

The second thing that happens “the next day” is a call to discipleship. After John's testimony, naturally people want to know more about Jesus. They leave what they are doing, what they have known, the places of comfort and security, and they follow. Again, the gospel of John tells the story a little differently than we're accustomed to hearing it. Jesus doesn't go down the shore to call these men away from their fishing nets. In fact, he doesn't approach them at all. Instead, John testifies to who Jesus is and others begin to follow him – a reminder to all of us not to doubt the power of our own testimony, or the effect it can have on others. The effect in this story is even kind of comical. So far Jesus hasn't said or done anything, the action has all taken place with other people. Jesus walks by and some of John's disciples peel off and begin trailing him, and when Jesus finally notices he's being followed he turns and asks “What are you looking for?” and they, in turn, ask “Rabbi – where are you staying?”

“What are you looking for?” – a question, followed by “where are you staying?” – a question. No one is giving away too much here, the new disciples won't even give Jesus a direct answer to his question, “what are you looking for?” Perhaps it's because they don't know yet what they're looking for. Perhaps it's because they want to know just

how far from their familiar surroundings they're going to be asked to travel. Whatever it is, they answer Jesus' question with a question of their own "where are you staying?"

The irony is, Jesus isn't staying. Jesus is going. Jesus is going to a wedding at Cana, then to clean house at the Temple. Jesus is going to share meal with his disciples, but then he is going to a trial, and an execution. Jesus is going to show us something about life that rises up in places left for dead. Jesus is going, not staying. But that's a little too much to take in all at once, so Jesus simply says, "come and see."

The disciples want to know where Jesus is staying so that they can decide where to make their home. Where to settle so that they can be close to him. This reminds me of the opening to St. Augustine's confessions where he writes, "Our heart is restless until it rests in you." We live in a world that makes us restless for the homecoming God offers, the return to the source. We long to rest in a place that can see us and love us and welcome us as we are. The irony is, in a world like ours, that means we have to get up and go – not stay put – because we don't live in that world. We are not citizens of a nation that has thrown its doors wide open to all the peoples of the world. No, we're actually considering building walls along our borders. We're not members of a church that welcomes all people, and I'm not talking just about LGBT people, I'm talking about the ways that our religiosity still spends so much of its time trying to draw lines that separate instead of setting tables that invite. Our heart is restless until it rests in God, and, ironically, to rest in God means not to stay put – but to go where God is going because God is on the move and is reaching out to draw us in, to call us home to one another. Jesus issues the invitation "come and see" and it is an invitation to re-imagine the very meaning of the word home. We will not find our rest in a place, but in a person, in relationship with God, which is to say in relationship with each other.

It is not at all hip to admit, especially in a church that boasts of a really excellent jazz combo like the one you've got, but this calls to mind a song from my childhood by Billy Joel called "You're My Home." He sings:

*Home can be the Pennsylvania Turnpike  
Indiana's early morning dew  
High up in the hills of California  
Home is just another word for you*

That is the challenge of "the next day." Something extraordinary took place here yesterday. You might be tempted to stay put, to revel in the afterglow of what was a barely imaginable and long-awaited day. But that day was yesterday. You are living in "the next day" which carries its own demands – for testimony and for discipleship. You have been revealed, I was there – I saw it – you are children of God, bearers of the message that we are all children of God. I will tell the truth about that wherever I go, and you will tell the truth about what you saw and heard. And we will be each other's home. We will answer the call to follow, to come and see, until we find our rest in the one who is our home.

Amen.