

I. The sky is torn, ripped open.

A. That's a good start for a story about an apocalypse. Spielberg could get into that.

1. Yes, the sky is ripped open, but it's not the violent destruction of the world – no way – it's just the Spirit coming upon Jesus with the message that Jesus is God's Beloved, in whom God is well pleased.
2. What, no earthquakes and screaming people, no plagues, no wars – no death.
3. Nope – this is the apocalypse of the Beloved.

B. Our common misuse of the word apocalypse, that connotes the end of the world and the suffering that attends it, as in the Apocalypse of John, a.k.a., the book of Revelation; that misuse empties the word of its positive meaning.

C. An apocalypse is a revelation.

1. It is a revelation that is so significant that it marks the end of one world and the beginning of another.
2. It is a revelation that changes reality in such a significant way that everything is now seen differently.

- D. That's what happened to Jesus in particular and to the world as a whole when Jesus rose from the waters of the Jordan.
 - E. On that apocalyptic day, Jesus arose from the waters of the Jordan to be greeted by the Spirit of God coming upon him and revealing to him that he is God's son, the beloved in whom God is well pleased.
 - F. And nothing in the world has been the same since.
- II. For the writer of Mark, who seems to have no knowledge of mangers or magi or virgin births, Jesus' baptism is the point at which the Spirit of God descends upon Jesus and his eyes are opened to the vision God is setting before him.
- A. For the writer of Mark, who wrote a good decade before Matthew and Luke were written, this is where it all begins.
 - B. It all begins with the apocalypse of the Beloved.
 - C. Jesus had taken a good 3 days journey, on foot, to get to John, where he was baptized

by John in what was both a baptism of repentance and purification, but, as Marcus Borg points out, it was “primarily an initiation ritual which symbolized and conferred a new identity” (Marcus Borg, *Jesus: A New Vision - Spirit, Culture, and The Life of Discipleship*).

- D. And that revelation of Jesus new identity must have been something because **immediately, IMMEDIATELY**, he headed off even deeper into the wilderness where he undertook a 40 day spiritual boot camp.
 - E. Now according to Mark, Jesus seems to have stayed in John’s community near the Red sea until John was arrested and at that time he headed north and returned to Galilee where his home had been, and from there he began to preach the good news that the Kingdom of God was near.
- III. Now most of us probably don’t have such apocalyptic experiences at our baptism. But maybe we should.
- A. Shouldn’t baptism, or if baptized as a baby, then confirmation, mark a radical change in our identity – a conversion, a repentance, a moving beyond who we are?

- B. Shouldn't we exit the sacrament or ritual a truly different person?
- C. We need to ask the question, "Are our baptism rituals sometimes so nice that we neglect to mention the uncomfortable implications of inviting God's Spirit to invade our lives?"
- D. Shouldn't we exit the baptismal waters, or the confirmation ritual, with a new personhood, a personality that is now profoundly possessed by God?
- E. Well – YAH!

IV. But first -- "first I want to thank my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ."

- A. I mean doesn't it just drive you nuts when he does that?
- B. You just want to slap him around a bit and tell him to stop show-boating his faith around like it his new toy pony.
- C. For those of you who don't know what I'm talking about, becoming just as famous as Tebowing is Tim Tebow's opening statement at any press conference.

- D. In fact, after the Chicago game, I turned off the TV and my good friend watching the game with me said,
“No, no – you have to turn it back on, we have to hear him say, “First I want to thank my Lord and Savior.”
And sure enough, on cue, the first words out of his mouth were,
“First I want to thank my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.”
- V. It does get a little annoying – oh but wait, isn't this exactly what I told you all that you should be doing in my last sermon.
- A. Oh yeah, all that stuff about giving thanks in everything.
Do you remember that?
- B. Certainly Tim's got a lot to be thankful for.
1. Thankful that he will get another opportunity to learn how to pass better.
 2. Thankful that his legs still work.
 3. Thankful that some linebacker didn't rip off his head.
 4. As 11 people try to kill him, just thankful that he's not dead.

- C. But how about us – maybe we, the ones who have received a totally new identity, a new personality profoundly possessed by the spirit of God should be just as thankful.**
1. At the grocery store when asked, “paper or plastic?” we should stop and say, “First I’d like to thank God.”
 2. When you get into that warm car on a cold winters day, before you start car you say, “First, I’d like to thank God.”
 3. When you sit down to eat with family or friends, “First, I’d like to thank God.”
 4. When the person who rear ends you starts exchanging insurance information you say, “First, I’d like to thank God.”
 5. When your child pushes the limits, using their intellect and stamina to test the limits of your patience, you stop and say, “First, I’d like to thank God.”
 6. After waiting for hours in line at the DMV, when they finally call your number, you stop and say, “First, I’d like to thank God.”
 7. When you find yourself feeling embarrassment at your inability to help the homeless man, who likely is suffering from trauma experienced while serving his country, before you turn away, you say, “First, I’d like to thank God.”

8. As the one you loved passes into new life, as you begin to grieve the loss, you say,
“First, I’d like to thank God.”

D. Thanking God in all things, means ALL THINGS.

VI. So again, shouldn’t we exit the baptismal waters, or the confirmation ritual, with a new personhood, a personality that is profoundly possessed by God?

A. Well – YAH!

B. And it seems like having a constant awareness of God’s presence in your life would be a good indication of that divine possession.

C. And thanking God in all things would be a good way of engendering and nurturing that awareness.

D. There are a lot of things in our daily lives that are contagious.

1. Anger is contagious.
2. Rudeness is contagious.
3. Greed is contagious.

4. Gratitude is also contagious.

E. Giving God thanks is contagious.

1. Imagine the effect on the grocery store cashier, when before you sign that little credit card machine thing, you say, “First, I want to thank God.”
2. Every Thanksgiving, Shelly’s family has a ritual of listening to Arlo Guthrie do his song Alice’s Restaurant and there is this little part of the song that I think speaks to where I’m headed with this.
 - a) At this point in the song he has been arrested for littering and now is making his visit to register for the military draft, (remember this is the late 60s) but because of his arrest for littering he finds himself with some real criminals on the Group W bench where they all get a chance to see a psychologist to see if they are morally acceptable to go to war -- which is where we will join the lyrics.

And friends, somewhere in Washington enshrined in some little folder, is a study in black and white of my fingerprints. And the only reason I'm singing you this song now is cause you may know somebody in a similar situation, or you may be in a similar situation, and if you're in a situation like that

there's only one thing you can do and that's walk into the shrink wherever you are, just walk in say "Shrink, You can get anything you want, at Alice's restaurant."

And walk out.

You know, if one person, just one person does it they may think he's really sick and they won't take him.

And if two people, two people do it, in harmony, they may think they're both [gay] and they won't take either of them.

And if three people do it, three, can you imagine, three people walking in singing a bar of Alice's Restaurant and walking out. They may think it's an organization.

And can you, can you imagine fifty people a day, I said fifty people a day walking in singing a bar of Alice's Restaurant and walking out.

And friends -- they may think it's a movement.

3. A movement – That's what they'll think it is.
If everybody starts saying,
"First, I want to thank God."

F. Maybe then people will have an apocalypse that they and all the people around them are God's beloved.

VII. Yes, people will think it's a movement, a movement of gratitude and constantly recognizing God's loving grace in our lives.

- A. And can you imagine, just imagine what affect this will have on you and everyone you meet.
- B. Why it will spread like a virus.
- C. Why -- it will spread like a weed - like a mustard weed.
- D. And then we will know that God's Realm is truly at hand.

AMEN.