

“Quality And Strategy”  
Psalm 29  
Mark 1:4-11

We have gathered this Baptism of the Lord Sunday to lift up the hope, peace, joy, and love of God that we have received in our Savior and Lord Jesus Christ. Each one of us can share the power of our baptism with someone, somewhere today. And, with what happened in our nation’s Capitol on Wednesday, there is no better time than now for us to live out our baptism offering transformation to depraved human nature as well as healing in the racial, economic and political divide.

God’s unconditional love transforms the depravity of human nature. Listen to this account of human nature undergoing transformation from depravity to a fuller depiction of the image of God. Tony Campolo writes,

Many years ago, when I was a young pastor, I was asked to be a counselor at a junior-high camp. Everyone should be a counselor at a junior-high camp-ONCE! For any Roman Catholics who may be reading this, I have to say that I now believe there is a purgatory. I have been there. It’s junior-high camp! Junior-high boys have a strange and often cruel sense of humor. There is a strong tendency for them to pick on some unfortunate, offbeat kid and ridicule him, making him the brunt of their jokes. This was certainly the case during this particular week of summer camp. They picked on a thirteen-year-old kid named Billy, who couldn’t walk right or talk right. He dragged his body across the campground in spastic fashion, and when he spoke his words were markedly slurred. The boys at the camp would often mimic his gestures, and they thought that was funny. One day I heard him asking for directions. I can even now hear his almost indiscernible, painfully spoken words: “Which...way...is...the craft shop?” The boy he asked, mocking his slurred speech and using convoluted hand language said, “Its over-there...Billy boy.” But the cruelest thing they did was on a Thursday morning. Billy’s cabin had been assigned to lead morning devotions, and his cabin mates all voted him to be the speaker. They wanted to get him up there in front of everybody so they could be entertained by his struggling attempts to say anything at all. It did not seem to bother Billy. Somehow he dragged himself up to the rostrum as waves of snickers flowed over the audience. It took Billy almost half a minute to say, “Je-sus...loves...me... and...I...love Je-sus.” When he finished

there was stunned silence. When I looked over my shoulder I saw that all over the place there were junior-high boys with tears streaming down their cheeks. Some of them had their heads bowed. A revival broke out!”<sup>1</sup>

Suffering shapes us. The quality of our lives and the strategies we adopt when we are in the midst of suffering are critical. In this regard, Pastor, Author (*Crushing: God Turns Pressure into Power*) and Speaker T. D. Jakes writes,

Could there be sanctity in your suffering? Could your worst moments truly become more than shameful secrets of your past mistakes? What if you could see your life as God sees it? What if your best moments are waiting ahead? My friend, I’m convinced God can use the weight crushing your soul right now to create his choicest wine, if you will let Him. Crushing is not the end.<sup>2</sup>

You can trust Jesus to shape you in those life crushing experiences. You’re quality of life will improve in and through suffering.

Psalm 29 and Mark 1:4-11 declare that creation is under the sway of God’s love.

Psalm 29 proclaims that God’s decisive actions afford opportunities to be less depraved and shaped more into the image of God. Psalm 29:11 reads, “May the LORD give strength to his people! May the LORD bless his people with peace.”

Mark 1:4-11 reinforces the belovedness of every human being. Jesus Christ came to save humanity. Jesus stood before John the Baptist representing you and me. All righteousness was completed and confirmed in Jesus’ baptism. Jesus was not repenting of sin, but representing yours, mine and everyone’s sin. You went under that day in the Jordan River. I went under that day in the Jordan. Every human being past, present and future went under that day in the Jordan. When God said that God was well pleased with Jesus, God said the same thing to you, me and every human being. Mark 1:11 reads,

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<sup>1</sup>Tony Campolo, *Let Me Tell You a Story* (Nashville, Tennessee: W Publishing Group, 2000), 111-112.

<sup>2</sup>T. D. Jakes, *Crushing* (New York City, New York: FaithWords, 2019), 16.

“You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.”<sup>3</sup>

Baptism tells every child and adult that they are loved by God. Baptism tells us that God is for us. Baptism tells us that Jesus Christ defeated sin and the depravity of human nature. On this Baptism of the Lord Sunday remember that love, not hate, redeems suffering. Again, T. D. Jakes writes, “Quality takes time, and you are God’s masterpiece... when God escorts you out of your season of pain, be sure to leave behind the sorrow, bitterness, and anger... God is not done with you yet. You are a seed designed to sprout... Your fruit is becoming His [God’s] wine.”<sup>4</sup> Let God shape you in and through suffering. Live the transformative love of God, not the hate of depravity. Be a blessing to others who are stuck in a life experience of suffering and hate. Know that you are loved. Jesus is pleased with you. Amen.

*This sermon was preached (Livestream due to the Coronavirus) on Sunday, 10 January 2021,  
Baptism of the Lord Sunday, by the Rev. Dr. Steven M. Marsh in the Sanctuary  
at Geneva Presbyterian Church in Laguna Woods, California*

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<sup>3</sup>In the three paragraphs of textual analysis above, I have benefited from the thinking of John W. Wurster, Sarah S. Henrich and Mary N. Pugh in Joel B. Green, Thomas G. Long, Luke A. Powery, Cynthia L. Rigby and Carolyn J. Sharp, editors, *Connections, Year B, Volume 1* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2020), 172-173, 179-181, 181-182.

<sup>4</sup>T. D. Jakes, *Crushing*, 34, 52-53.