

“Love and Forgiveness,” Common Street Spiritual Center, 1/18/15

Rev. Ian Mevorach

In the time of Jesus baptism was a common ritual in Judaism. It is an outward bathing of the body that signifies an inward cleansing of the soul.

John the Baptist was not a priest but a prophet. He was not only cleansing personal sin but also social sin. He was not only preaching personal transformation but also social transformation.

But I want to bear witness that baptism is primarily a personal matter. Baptism is above all about the soul and its cleansing. There is a crust that develops on our souls through living in the world. I don't see it as something we are born with—because we are born perfect and innocent—but rather something that develops.

I am sure I am not the only one who has dealt with a slow or clogged drain.

I would suggest that sin is like the hair and goop that can clog a drain pipe, that can cause the water to drain very slowly or back up completely.

Sin is a progressive problem—if untreated, it gets worse, it grows on itself.

Sometimes we see our own sin or the sin of others when the drain backs up visibly, so to speak. We see sin break out in violence, betrayal, and patterns of harm and neglect of self and others.

It is fitting that water is used in the ritual of baptism, because water is a necessary part of our daily lives. We need to drink water to survive, and it is essential for hygiene, for growing food and for the life of all plants and animals. Life is not possible without water. It is our most precious resource. To answer the question, “Is there life on Mars?” begs the question “Is their water on Mars?”

Brothers and sisters, forgiveness of sins is like water that cleanses the crust and junk that clogs our souls. It is a daily necessity. In the prayer Jesus taught his disciples forgiveness is linked with daily bread..."Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors."

Through forgiveness our souls become open to the flow of the Holy Spirit, we become able to hear the voice of God saying, "You are my beloved child".

But forgiveness is not only something we need to receive from God. We also need to forgive one another; without this there is a barrier that will develop that will prevent us from loving each other.

And, finally, I want to close by saying that forgiveness is not, at its best, an end or goal in itself. We can seek forgiveness merely so that someone will not continue to be angry at us, so that they won't take revenge on us for something we've done. OK, that is something. That is better than nothing. But whether in relation to God, or ourselves, or others whom we have wronged and been wronged by, we can go beyond seeking forgiveness for its own sake. The motivation of true forgiveness is the desire for loving relationship. When we long to love God, to love ourselves, and to love one another, that longing creates the conditions for true forgiveness to take place.

I believe that we all come here to this world from God. We were with God before we came into this world and we knew God's love. We knew that we are children of God. And so we use the water of forgiveness to wash away the crust that develops in the course of life, the crust made of hurt and pain and the confusion of our own misdeeds, for we long to return to the knowledge of the love of God.