

When I was quite young—around 7 or 8. On many a Saturday afternoon I would come bounding into the house, pass my mom on the way to grab a snack and hear, "Ugh! You smell like a dog. Go take a shower!"

Growing up the only child on the family ranch meant that what I lacked in peers, I made up in cattle dogs. So on those rare weekends I wasn't handing my dad tools while he repaired a trailer or holding staples while they put up new barbed wire, I would head outside and hang out with my friends. And these were not the well-groomed dogs of the Northeast.

I never gave a second thought to crawling around outside just like those sweet yellow canines as they led me to wherever rest of the pack was soaking up the Texas sun. I also didn't mind lying down next to them in the hay, absorbing that lovely odor my mom so despised.

When you're seven you aren't ashamed to be made of the same stuff as the hay and the dogs. A couple decades later it's difficult to imagine lying down, or allowing children of my own, to lie down curled up with those filthy ranch dogs in the summer sun.

But it's amazing what we can learn from children—and our own child-selves—about the mundane. About the beauty of dirt. About the joy of being with other creatures. About the sacred in the simple.

As we turn back to Genesis, I can't help but recognize that same joyous simplicity in our collective beginning. In the world's beginning. The first Biblical creation account, the one we just read, is the one most of us are familiar with. "On the first day... on the second day... and so on." It's the one that connects best to our Western sensibilities. It explains things in an orderly fashion. It seems... almost... scientific. Except for that part of God

having a hand in all of it, and that spirit sweeping over the face of the waters, and on and on.

I think that is probably because the stories of Scripture are much less about the scientific “how” and more about the theological “why”? “What for?” At least how that’s they speak to me.

It’s sad to me that fundamentalist Christianity seems to be obsessed with the order of the seven days of creation being some doctrinal assertion. Because what happens in the beginning of Scripture is much *more* than an explanation. It’s a pronouncement. It’s not just descriptive, but also declarative. And it comes in the form of a repeated phrase. “And it was good.”

When the discussion is only about the “how” we forget this key assertion. That it is good. That the stinky, dirty dogs of my childhood—all the mud and bacteria and parasites, all that stuff that gets into our nose and makes our faces wince—all that muck and stuff is good. We are good.

Now, of course, we know something goes wrong along the way. Something gets broken in the world. And for me, that’s the story of Scripture, of this book as a whole, how to deal with the fact that what was created from the mundane and messy is good... but goes awry.

How do we navigate that as humans—that sense that things are not how they should be? That’s the life of faith.

And things are not as they should be. Look at Paris. Look at the suicides of transgender youth. Look at drought. Look at Ferguson. Look at Islamaphobia. Look at ourselves.

Things are most certainly not as they should be. Because we are good. The world is good. That's the claim. The audacious claim.

Over the last couple months, we, as the church, have been freshly reminded of that claim. We've been remembering that God did not, does not abandon us. That the Holy chooses to dwell in our midst, chooses to anoint our lives with the presence of the sacred.

We know this through the story and life of Jesus Christ, born in poverty, in a stable. In the very messy grossness of the world. That is where we find God. In the mundane. The dirty. The simple.

So it's no surprise that when we catch up to Jesus today, his public ministry begins alongside the likes of John the Baptizer, a figure who I must admit reminds me a bit of my stinky childhood self.

The voice crying out in the wilderness, John the Baptizer appears from the desert inviting people to repent, be baptized, and know they are forgiven. He wears camel's hair and leather that hearken back to the prophet Elijah. He eats wild locusts and honey, rejecting the cultured things of civilization, he subsists on the simple, the mundane.

If he were around today he might resemble someone you see slouched over in the far corner of the subway car. Everyone moving away. And it is this mundane, possibly crazy person through whom God works to recognize Jesus as the Christ, as the beloved.

God works through John... and water. Water, that substance all around us and in us that is the very definition of the mundane. Water, that was here in the beginning when the spirit hovered over it.

And it's through John and water that God anoints Jesus in the spirit, claims him, and pronounces his goodness. It's a moment where the sacred breaks into the simple. And, for me, baptism remains one of our most powerful traditions, rituals, sacraments. Because it makes meaning from the ordinary, and claims that we are extraordinary.

When we take a child, and sometimes an adult, though usually a child because we're Presbyterians. When we take a child, wrapped in beautiful clothes, powdered to smell nice and cover up some more natural odors. When we take a child and place water over their foreheads in baptism, God claims them as good and holy and beloved. Much like the beginning of creation and the baptism of Christ. Though they will go awry, though they will mess up, nothing changes that the Sacred holds them in Love. Nothing.

And that's what the work of Parity, the organization I lead, is about. It's about reaching out to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer people who have been pushed away from the church. People the church has failed. People to whom the church made promises at their baptism. People who were told they were good and claimed by God. But then soon discovered there were false caveats to God's love and acceptance. Even for who we are created to be.

Through the partnership of congregations like yours, at Parity we reach out to and minister with LGBTQ youth, emerging pastors, and those who support and love them. And we remind them that even if the church has failed them, the promises are remain true. God did indeed create us, and we are good.

Everyone needs a little reminding of that. In a few minutes we will take time to do that. To be reminded and remember our own baptisms.

Even if we think we're too dirty or insignificant or mundane, it's the Holy of the messy, stinky, broken world who breaks forth from the heavens, claims us and calls us beloved.

And we remember the baptisms of others, that each of us is God's beloved. Even if we think they are simple, or gross, or awful, it's the Sacred of the world gone awry that claims them and calls us each beloved.

And there's nothing we can do about it. Thanks be to God. Amen.