

“Draw Near to Truth”
Luke 3:1-6

The last couple of weeks we have had to deal with someone knocking down a sign we have in front of our church. The sign says, “God Loves Everyone No Exceptions.” Somehow someone has found this statement to be a threat to his or her own belief system. Instead of engaging us and talking to us about what is bothersome about the statement, this person thought that the truth is objective and that he/she knows that truth more than we do. We see this in so many instances in our lives. When we disagree with others, we tend to separate ourselves from them. It is always so tough to deal with our differences when we become certain that we have the truth while others don't.

In her book *The Lost Art of Scripture*, Karen Armstrong writes, “We all –scientists as well as mystics -know only representations of reality, not reality itself. We deal with the world as it appears to us, not as it intrinsically is, so some of our interpretations may be more accurate than others. This somewhat disturbing news means that the ‘objective truths’ on which we rely are inherently illusive...We are surrounded by a reality that transcends --- or ‘goes beyond’ ---our conceptual grasp.” Armstrong goes on to argue that our best chance of connecting to the truth is when we are able to perceive reality through both hemispheres of our brains. She writes, “neurologists have discovered that the right hemisphere of the brain is essential to the creation of poetry, music and religion. It is involved with the formation of our sense of self and has a broader, less focused mode of attention than the left hemisphere, which is more pragmatic and selective. Above all, it sees itself as connected to the outside world, whereas the left hemisphere holds aloof from it.” These insights help us to see that if we are to draw near to the truth, we have to be willing to balance our left brain's analytical and inwardly focused knowledge with our right brain's artistic and outwardly focused ways of knowing.

The scriptures and the stories of faith help us to find that balance. Through the journey of faith, we are invited to lean into ways of knowing reality that move us outside of ourselves into the mysteries of life and of the universe. We cannot intellectualize our ways to the truth because our left brains lack the ability to transcend our limitations. We have to be willing to journey through mystery through things that point us to the greater truth of life toward love, compassion, peace, and justice. Armstrong notes that it is important to empty ourselves of egotism in order to be able to connect to the greater truth of life. Yet, this kind of emptying requires teachers. She writes, “some traditions insist that you cannot read scripture by yourself. You need a teacher who trains his or her disciples to adopt a way of life that systematically ‘goes beyond’ the ego, dismantling our instinctive tendency to place ourselves at the center of the world.”

That is where our Bible story takes us today. It takes us to one of these teachers who helped people to know reality in creative and experiential ways.

In preparing people for this ministry of his cousin, Jesus, John the Baptist offered people an alternative way to open their lives to God's truth. John offered rituals, practices, and visions that helped lead people to know God's truth in their hearts. The religious and

political leaders of his day were corrupted by a vision of the world that put ego power at the center. They harmed their communities for the sake of wealth and power. But John came proclaiming an alternative vision. The brilliance of his movement was that it was deeply rooted in developing the right hemisphere of the human brain and of the human spirit. He helped his people draw near to truth by going out into the wilderness, getting baptized, relearning the poetic words of the prophets about justice, and practicing justice and compassion in their daily lives.

Today as we prepare for the coming of Christ into our broken world, we are invited to embrace the journey of teachers like John the Baptist. We cannot think our way into God's expansive truth that is beyond any of our imaginings. We are instead invited to lean into the truth of God through right-brain practices that help us release the hold of our egos on our lives. We can do that through rituals, daily practices of justice, and the poetry of our faith.

For our prayer today, I want to invite you to do something a little uncomfortable. It will involve water, since the symbol that is best associated with John the Baptist is the water of baptism. Water is also a symbol of birth which is appropriate as we make room in our hearts for the birth of Christ. I was inspired by Samuel Rahberg who wrote the following meditation. "The heart of the meditation is noticing and waiting with whatever you feel as you watch a water glass spilling over. It offers a low-impact way to learn about yourself during in the face of something outside your control." The heart of this meditation is "to explore your response to potential discomfort, and to experience a sense of connection with others.

Take some time with me to practice your response to unexpected and difficult things. One meditation may not relieve all the anxiety in ourselves or the leadership situations we face, but a little time in reflection just might make all the difference to your next conversation.

Meditation: Breathe deeply, center yourself. Breathe into any places of tension within your body. Be present to this special moment. Now you are going to step even more deeply into a quieter space within yourself. Now imagine yourself standing comfortably with a pitcher of clear cold water in your hand. You have come to the top of the stairway with the intention to go down. It is comfortable and familiar, even if you can't quite see where it leads. As your foot touches and you hold the water steadily, a wave of peace and comfort passes through your whole body. You reach the second step feeling calm and relaxed. You step down a third time moving deeper into relaxation. Now you take a fourth step down feeling even more relaxed. Now you take a fifth and final step, feeling completely safe and comfortable. You enter a gently lit and lovely room with a table and a chair. You walk slowly and carefully toward it, pitcher in hand, knowing there is a place for you and only you. As you get closer to the table, you notice that there is a clear glass. You step even closer and begin to gently pour water from your pitcher into the glass. Listen and watch the water moving gently from the pitcher into the glass, filling slowly. It is now full. You set down your pitcher. When you reach out to take the glass, you bump it. You see the glass start to wobble. The water starts to slosh. In this precise moment, everything

slows. You breathe in whatever you are experiencing: surprise, frustration, fear, the warm rush of adrenaline, the fire quick impulse to reach for the glass. Notice whatever you are feeling and just breathe into it. This glass, the table, this chair is just for you. No one else is watching or judging. While the glass continues to wobble, see if you can ease your way into the chair still watching the glass move, the water slosh, still noticing whatever it is that you are feeling. Is it hard to resist reaching for the glass? Is something like worry or impatience moving through you? See if you can breathe into those sensations and let the glass wobble. There is nothing wrong with the glass wobbling. It is just moving, and you are just watching. In a moment, you are going to let the glass tip and the water spill. Just keep breathing, knowing in this space place, the glass will not break and the water will do no damage. See if you can find something in yourself deeper than worry or fear. Maybe you can touch that place of wonder and curiosity. Prepare your senses to watch, listen, and absorb what is about to happen.

When you are ready, and however you would like to, let the glass tip. Let the water spill out onto the table. There is no need to stop it or fix it. Let go of your impulse to intervene. Instead, allow your curious self to pay attention. Was the tipping fast or slow? Did the glass bounce or roll? How is the water moving from the glass? Is it a great wave or a small trickle? What do you hear? Whatever you feel as you notice these things, keep breathing gently into those emotions. What is the glass doing? Has come it to rest or is it still moving? Wait until it stops safely on the table. Now the water, is it pooling on the table or making its way to the edge? Maybe it is dripping now onto the floor. The glass is empty, the table is wet. The floor is wet. Listen and watch with no responsibility to change things. You feel and you breathe...This moment is fine. The spilled water is fine. You are doing exactly what you need to do. Let yourself follow the water and see how far it gets. Eventually, the spilled water begins to evaporate. You watch patiently as this process unfolds. You realize that the spilled water is now being lifted into the air and then into the clouds to become rain once more. Now listen to the rain as it touches the earth. Allow the sound of rain to bring you peace and comfort knowing that even when things seem to be lost, there is potential for new life and new possibilities and that in the end, nothing is really lost. Give thanks to God for this experience of peace and remember that you carry it in your heart that is beyond your attempts for control. It is there under all the worries, fears, and turbulence of life. This is the truth of who you truly are. Amen.