

# ST. JOHN'S AT DIOCESAN CENTER IGLESIA EPISCOPAL DE SAN JUAN

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## CONSECRATION

**The Rev. Andrew F. Kline**

Text of a Sermon preached on the 1<sup>st</sup> Sunday after Epiphany

January 10, 2021

GENESIS 1:1-5 | PSALM 29

ACTS 19:1-7 | MARK 2:1:4-11

Wednesday, the feast of Epiphany, brought us a revelation, not of wisemen visiting from afar, but of a mad mob storming and looting the Capital of our nation. It was unexpected by many, unwanted by most, and shocking to all. As on the morning of 9/11, we will remember where we were on afternoon of 1/6/2021. Most of us are still processing what we saw unfold.

Several days later, David Brooks was asked to describe how he felt. He paused, and finally spoke just one word – desecration. A deep sense of who we are as a country, as a people united to live together as citizens and neighbors, was smashed along with the windows and furniture of the people’s house.

The fruit of dishonest and deceptive leadership, intent on disrupting the certification of a free and fair election, was laid bare for all to see. Neighbors projected their own faults and fears on others, and called good honest disagreement evil, and an evil will to power, good. It was a desecration of everything we know is sacred in a democracy guided and guarded by the rule of law and, most importantly, virtuous citizens.

God’s people are not strangers to such violation and madness. God’s house in Jerusalem was destroyed not once, but twice, the second time with finality by the Romans in 70 AD. As a prelude, a generation earlier, the dignity of God’s Son was stripped, smashed, and trampled upon as he made his way to the cross.

The power of God can seem obscured and vanquished by other powers. But then, in the fullness of time, comes the gift of the Holy Spirit.

According to God’s word to us this morning, the gift of the Spirit is given us in a representative human being, who shows up to identify himself with God’s project of redemption and who consecrates himself to fulfill it.

Our reading from Genesis reminds us that, without the Spirit, there is no beginning, much less a hope for a new start. This morning we get to play with the image of the Spirit as the force that breaks open the heavens and brings forth light.

Every true Godward project, every movement of redemption, begins by calling forth the “light”. The first of God’s creations is transparency, truth, reality. Lies, delusion, noise with no signal, have no place here. Without the truth, we cannot get started, we cannot begin again. We are simply and utterly lost.

Thankfully, God's voice thunders over the waters. God's voice calls us back to this light when we fall into darkness. Yet, we know well, how hard it is to hear this voice. We live in a time so flooded by useless information, we have lost the skill, the virtue, of patiently shifting through the messages we receive, and recognizing where it comes from and what motives have let it loose in the world.

To be blunt, we have arrived at this moment because too many people are willing to believe what others tell them without discernment, without weighing what others have to gain, without understanding deeply what our Baptismal Covenant describes as "the powers of evil that corrupt and destroy the creatures of God." We must never stop doing the hard work of thinking critically. We cannot just throw up our hands and decide we can believe what we want to believe. If we want to be heard, we must first sow that we can truly listen.

Today we have an opportunity to go back to the beginning of where the Holy Spirit takes residence in our life, where the Spirit can take the lead in our imaginations, and recommit ourselves to the light of the Truth of the one who identified himself with us in the River Jordan.

Jesus' baptism is a compact, dense symbol, of creation and recreation. Jesus' baptism takes up the acceptance of the failure of God's people to live in the light of the truth, to cross over the Jordan and possess the good things that God has always promised. But we can seek those good things, and together even possess them, if we humble ourselves and look to the light. As Jesus rises up from the water, and the heavens open, there is a simple voice, that becomes a path, the knowledge of our eternal identity as children of God.

We rejoice that Jesus' Father delights in him. We rejoice that through faith in Jesus, God delights in us. We rejoice, that as Jesus rises from the waters of baptism, he takes up his mission. We rejoice, that as we are baptized into the death and resurrection of Christ, we receive our marching orders as well.

Are we ready to hear God's voice thunder over the waters? Will we recommit ourselves to witnessing to God's love, returning to the Lord when we go astray, breaking bread and saying our prayers, and honoring the dignity of every human being? We will turn again, from every corner, from every perspective, to the light?

For this, we need the power of the Spirit. Thankfully, the light of the Spirit always surprises. As I find myself overwhelmed with the sadness of ruin of our sacred temple, the desecration of the people's house, I find myself thinking of an image that has gone viral in the past days. A lone congressman, taking a break from the divisive debate resuming in the wee hours of Thursday morning, gets up and starts walking around the halls outside Congress. He suddenly finds himself, in the midst of all the destruction, on his hands and knees, picking up the broken glass and trash left by the insurrection. There. Right there. I see a light break through. I feel the sky open, the wind shift, and the spirit descend.

I pray that every person in this country, in this community, can see that they are more than what this society, or economy, or culture, reality TV star tells them they are. I pray that we can see the United States of America for what it truly is, so that we can begin to heal, to change, and to transform.

Today we renew our Baptismal Vows. I hope and trust that there will be one phrase in the words of the Covenant that will jump out at you, that will not let you go. Today, after an experience of desecration, we consecrate ourselves. May our true identity in Christ and the light of the Holy Spirit be our antidote, our firm reply to all the forces that attempt to corrupt and destroy the creatures of God.