

BAPTIZED PRESBYTERIAN
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January 11, 2009
Baptism of Our Lord Sunday
Shepherdstown Presbyterian Church

Mark 1:4-11

In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. And a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased."

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Breaking news: Jesus was not baptized Presbyterian. He wasn't baptized Christian either. He wasn't baptized Jewish. He was baptized, which is to say, initiated into a certain aspect of Judaism, the prophetic tradition. It was a good place to begin but he didn't end there.

This morning Sallye Price is still very much on our minds and in our hearts. The loss of Sallye is not just another loss. Sallye was a vibrant and faithful member of this church for a long, long time. We won't soon if ever get over missing her.

It's so very fitting that today we commissioned deacons and later today begin our confirmation class for youth. Sallye was proud to be deacon of the church and she was eager to learn all she could about the Presbyterian tradition.

It case you didn't know or hadn't heard, Sallye loved this church and the Presbyterian tradition it embodies. She didn't mind telling you that she was raised something else but with good luck married a man who on top of all his other charming qualities was also a Presbyterian. And not just any kind of Presbyterian.

Jim is a Presbyterian from many generations of Presbyterians with roots through Ulster Ireland back to Scotland. It doesn't get more Presbyterian than that. Or more scary!

It's likely that some of Jim's ancestors took up arms to free this land from the tyranny of King George. Here's something you might not know: King George is reported to have complained that the so-called American Revolution was just another Scots-Irish Presbyterian rebellion. They were an irritant to me here, he said, and they're an irritant over there! Presbyterians can be a nuisance in more ways than one.

Mark Twain was one. But so were Mr. Rogers, Shirley Temple and John Muir. Astronaut Sally Ride is one as is Condolezza Rice and David Letterman. President Reagan was one. President George Bush isn't. And President-elect Obama is as close to being one without actually being one. All of which goes to proof.... I'm not sure. Make of it what you will.

Presbyterians are born, baptized, and bred to love this world and to hate injustice. We get that from John Calvin who got it from Jesus who got it from prophets like Jeremiah and Amos who got it from Moses who got it by listening to something deep in his heart and deep in the heart of the earth. Presbyterian roots go very, very deep.

Sallye loved the Presbyterian tradition. She didn't disapprove of or dislike other traditions but she made the choice to dig one well a thousand feet deep rather than ten wells 100 feet deep. Guess what: if you dig deep enough into this tradition you'll likely tap the one aquifer that feeds all the others.

When as a young adult Sallye first began digging, she came across the first question in the Presbyterian Shorter Catechism. *What is the chief end or purpose of humankind?* Answer: *Humankind's chief purpose is to glorify God and enjoy God forever.*

Well, that's all it took to transform her heart into a fountain of joyous, rapturous love for the Holy Mystery that fills the heavens and the earth and all that dwells therein. She would thenceforth live her life in the way and in the spirit of Jesus, which is to say in true communion with God and in true community with others.

I know quite a few people in this community who felt shunned or overlooked until Sallye befriended them. Such love doesn't come naturally. Sallye worked at it. She had a quiet, unpretentious piety. Love, you see, is a gift to one and all but it can be neglected or cultivated. We make a choice daily.

Today Brandon and I begin a confirmation class with 10th-12th graders. We will invite the youth to accept their identity as Presbyterians at least for the time being and over the next 10 weeks we will help them dig as deep as they'd like to go. As long as you're a Presbyterian, we'll tell them, why not become as informed as possible. Each youth will be assigned a mentor who will serve them in the way and in the spirit of Sallye.

To be baptized or initiated into the Presbyterian tradition is a good start but if it ends there it's a shame. Sallye loved the Presbyterian tradition. She loved its exuberant embrace of this awesome and fearsome world. She loved its embrace of public education, of higher education, of art, of science, of environmentalism, and of social justice. She loved it deeply. But she didn't wear her piety on her sleeve. She wove it into her heart and into her daily practices.

My own son who is hardly a big fan of the church is, however, a big fan of Sallye. When Nate and his wife came home over Christmas with 3-month-old twins his very first visit was to Sallye at Canterbury. Her weary and worn body lit up as she gobbled those babies up in her arms. Why did he visit? I'm guessing it's because that when he was baptized here, he, like every other child baptized here, instantly got a second mother in Sallye.

The church is many things. But at its best it's a community of the Beloved. It's not so much about indoctrination. It's about forming caring relationships over time.

Parents, please listen to me. The more your children are present here and at other church events the more likely those relationships will develop and last a lifetime. How blessed the child blessed by adults who know how to bless.

There is much to say and study and learn about the wonderful and intriguing Presbyterian tradition. But when all is said and done it's about gathering with our beloved community around the community table to be fed by the mysterious yet real presence of the Beloved.

On the first Sunday of this past November Sallye lifted her weary bones from her pew and dragged her frail body to the Table where for the last time she would commune in the presence of her beloved Lord and her beloved community of faith.