

Interactive lesson



picture from

<https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:2022PolarBearPlungeCDA.jpg>

Come on in, the water's fine!

What is pictured here? <Let them respond>

This particular event was the 2022 Polar Bear Plunge at Sanders Beach in Coeur d'Alene, Idaho.

Did everyone at that beach go in the water?

<Let them respond>

Do you think those who did go in are crazy for doing it? <Let them respond>

Why do you think they are doing it?

<Let them respond; usually a charitable event in US>

What would it take to get you to join in?

<Let them respond>

What parallels can you draw from an event like this to our faith? <Let them respond>

Some members of society may think we are nuts for diving into serve Jesus. Others may have fun watching us but not participating. How can we convince others to join us in Christian living? <Let them respond>

God calls us in to the waters of the Holy Spirit. It can be exciting, scary, and uncomfortable, but more rewarding than anyone can predict. It is also something we do not do alone; we need the support of others and to encourage others to join us. And unlike

the polar bear plunge, we can stay in the water because we know the Holy Spirit will sustain us. Come on in, the water's fine!

Gospel lesson

Let's hear now how even Jesus took the plunge.



picture from <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Baptism-of-Christ.jpg>, cropped; artist: David Zelenka

Matthew 3:13-17

NRSV

¹³ Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan, to be baptized by him.

¹⁴ John would have prevented him, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?"

¹⁵ But Jesus answered him, "Let it be so now; for it is proper for us in this way to fulfill all righteousness." Then he consented.

¹⁶ And when Jesus had been baptized, just as he came up from the water, suddenly the heavens were opened to him and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him.

¹⁷ And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased."

The word of God for the people of God

<Hymn "Spirit Song"

UMH #347>

Message: The Water's Fine



background picture and overlay from <https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/worship-planning/god-of-the-dark-and-the-light/new-years-day-year-a-lectionary-planning-notes/new-years-day-year-a-graphics>

Please pray with me?

Almighty God who invites us to something new,
as we take time now to further consider today's
scriptures, please

- speak Your words through my mouth,
- open our ears to hear Your message, and
- abide in our hearts,

That we may have courage to seek and serve You. Amen.

We begin a new series today, "Glimpses of the Kingdom."

"This series is designed to help us see the [kingdom] of God lived out in concrete ways within the body of Christ...The Baptism of the Lord is a perfect time to remind ourselves of the commitment to living a life of grace and hope outwardly."

"So, this week is the promise to be that example, to claim that grace and gift, and to embrace the responsibility of being the church in the world right now."

This past summer, Keven and I took his mother to visit his Uncle Gary at his lake house. It was a hot, sunny day with a beautiful view of Lake Cayuga from under the shade trees. I was taking all kinds of scenic pictures when I got the idea of taking one of the camp from in that water.



picture from MMMS collection

I prepared for it by rolling up my pants legs and taking off my shoes and socks. When I left the shade and waded into the water under the hot sun, I was surprised at how refreshing it felt to stand in the cool lake water. I got the camera shot that I wanted, but then I dawdled a little before going back to shore because of how good it felt.

I have found the Holy Spirit often works that way. Going about your life, you are struck by a Holy inspiration to try something different. You prepare for it; you do it with those you trust nearby to help in case something goes awry, perhaps inviting them to do it with you; and once in the midst of it, you find unexpected rewards. I think we tend to be much more encouraging of others to join in at that point, when we feel confident and rewarded by it.

That's when we are open to the Spirit's call. Unfortunately, people spend a lot of time blind to

what God puts in front of them, prisoners of sin.

picture from MMMS collection



Isaiah described humanity as having eyes that are blind, as prisoners in a dark dungeon. Do not sit in spiritual darkness when God is calling to us, providing us with light and freedom from sin!

Humanity is continually growing, adapting to new situations with God's help. We do not live in eternal status quo, with deals by which we earn salvation. Like a seed sprouting, we are to grow out of the darkness and into the light of Christ.

In Isaiah's day, God said, "See, the former things have come to pass, and new things I now declare; before they spring forth, I tell you of them." God told the people that Jesus was coming. Instead of anointing a king to fight battles as had been done in the past, a baby was to be born. This servant would teach without harming others, bring justice without war. It was a new thing, for a new stage of humanity and our relationship with our Creator.

And we, as humanity, are still evolving. God tells us how to live so that we can grow in healthy ways. That is why we need to obey God, to live as Jesus taught us, to do as the Spirit guides us. We do not need to

resort to violence; we need to resort to love.

And yet, we hesitate. We are like the diabetic patient who knows they have to check their desensitized feet regularly,



picture from <https://www.pexels.com/photo/foot-massage-in-close-up-12649751/>;
credit: Dasha Mak

but instead winds up at the doctor's office with infected toes that need to be surgically cleansed, carefully bandaged, and to have proper follow up care for healing.

Have you been doing daily prayer, Bible readings, and discussing with your small faith group how your walk with Christ is going? Or have you allowed your soul to get reinfected with sin?

And what about the people around you? Are you modeling Jesus's love for them, helping them to see that cooperative, interdependent life is much richer than trying to do everything independently? Are you helping those you deal with to see how wonderful it is to live in the Holy Spirit? Invite them through your daily actions as well as your words!

John thought Jesus should baptize him rather than the other way around, but Jesus modeled life for us to follow. Putting first things first, He let everyone

see that He dedicated Himself to God before setting off to serve the people. It was an outward sign of inward grace, of a fundamentally new way of life.



background picture and overlay from <https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/worship-planning/glimpses-of-the-kingdom/baptism-of-the-lord-year-a-lectionary-planning-notes/baptism-of-the-lord-year-a-graphics>

As Christians seeking to help others find Christ, we also must put God first before reaching out. Have you truly opened your heart to God, accepted the wisdom of the Holy Spirit as greater than your own, and learned to share love with others as Jesus did? Or have you fallen into the popular media trap of believing that vigilantism and violence are the best ways of dealing with frustrating people and difficult situations?

Come on instead into the life of love God offers, that all may see the better way; the water's fine!

Now let us respond with

The World Methodist Social Affirmation UMH #886

We believe in God, creator of the world and all people;
and in Jesus Christ, incarnate among us,
who died and rose again;
and in the Holy Spirit,
present with us to guide, strengthen, and comfort

We believe; God, help our unbelief.

We rejoice in every sign of God's kingdom:
in the upholding of human dignity and community;
in every expression of love, justice, and reconciliation;
in each act of self-giving on behalf of others;
in the abundance of God's gifts
entrusted to us that all may have enough;
in all responsible use of the earth's resources.

Glory be to God on high; and on earth, peace.

We confess our sin, individual and collective,
by silence or action:
through the violation of human dignity
based on race, class, age, sex, nation, or faith;
through the exploitation of people
because of greed and indifference;
through the misuse of power
in personal, communal, national, and international life;
through the search for security
by those military and economic forces
that threaten human existence;
through the abuse of technology
which endangers the earth and all life upon it.

Lord, have mercy; Christ, have mercy; Lord, have mercy.

We commit ourselves individually and as a community
to the way of Christ:
to take up the cross;
to seek abundant life for all humanity;
to struggle for peace with justice and freedom;

to risk ourselves in faith, hope and love,
praying that God's kingdom may come.

Thy kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven. Amen.

<Doxology>

<Offertory / Pastoral Prayer>

Let us pray:

God of the water that cleans us, the land that feeds us, and the air that allows us to breathe your Spirit in and out of us;

You claim us in our baptism, but too few of us even remember our own baptism.

And if we remember (or imagine) our baptism, we too rarely grasp its meaning and power.

As we present our tithes and offering in worship and witness Christ's baptism once again, [remind us] that in that water we were, like Christ, commissioned to go: to teach, preach, heal, and even to take up a cross.

(above prayer from <https://www.umcdiscipleship.org>)

- Lord, please help {these members of the body of Christ whom we lift up} with Your healing touch and comfort:

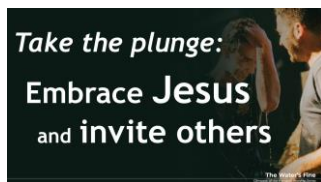
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- Thanks for
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- Hold those who cannot be with us in Your loving embrace until we see them again.
 - Family far off
 - Travelers
- Lord, please help all people who struggle, especially those to whom we remain oblivious.
- Send Your Spirit to address world/social problems
 - end bigotry, dismantle racism, reform systems persist
 - bring world peace
- Guide our Leaders – local, state, federal, international, and especially of Your church.

All these things we lift up in Your holy name, praying as you taught us to pray: *<Lord's Prayer>*

<Hymn "When Jesus Came to Jordan" UMH #252>

<Benediction>



background picture from <https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/worship-planning/glimpses-of-the-kingdom/baptism-of-the-lord-year-a-lectionary-planning-notes/baptism-of-the-lord-year-a-graphics>

Take the plunge, the water's fine!
 Welcome the Holy Spirit, embrace Jesus, and invite others to life in Christ with us, that all may glimpse the Kingdom of God in the here and now. Amen.