

I really think God could have done better. It should have been an eagle that came down when the heavens opened – powerful, wings spanning, talons grasping, beak tearing – an eagle. Armies march under the banner of an eagle – disciplined, proud, conquering. Nothing stands in the way of their power.

Or at least a hawk, coming out of nowhere to pin the prey.

But a dove?

My wife, Sue, does not like doves because their heads are too small. I tell her they cannot help it.

In my first parish Lloyd and Marian Miller gave me this picture of the dove that descended on Jesus but it really does not look like a dove at all.

And those stained glass windows in the back have a dove that looks more like a guided missile than one of those creatures that comes to eat the seeds that fall to the ground from the bird feeder.

Of all the ways God could have made apparent the Holy Spirit coming to Jesus God chose to send a dove – Luke tells us in bodily form.

God's Spirit a dove.

John the Baptist said that the one who came after him would baptize with the Holy Spirit and fire, that he would gather the wheat into his granary and burn the chaff with unquenchable fire. John was sure that God's Spirit in this one who followed him would bring judgement – a righting of wrongs and bringing evil to its end.

But that day when Jesus was baptized there was no fire, nor burning of the chaff, just the dove and a voice, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased."

And what is the first thing that Spirit does? It drives him out into the wilderness to endure hunger and thirst and temptation.

No one ever thought that is how it would be.

Isaiah had promised that the day of the Lord would bring a blooming of the desert, streams and flowers everywhere – the lion would lie down with the lamb and there would be peace. But when the heavens open and God's Spirit comes down to earth it is the opposite: Hunger, temptation, conflict for the beloved son.

Maybe it is not such a good idea to bring our children to this water.

It seems like the Son of God ought to have power and privilege, a crown of gold and a sword. But Jesus received a dove and a crown of thorns and a reed for a scepter. It seems like the Son of God should have been the one sitting in judgement over the Jewish leaders and the Roman governor, Pilate. But they are the ones who put him on trial and condemn him to be deserving of death. It all got off to a bad start with this dove. Why a dove?

Once when God had tried the judgement thing, when God had sent rain falling to cover the earth and fountains gushing up water from under the earth and baptized the whole earth with death – once when God had save but a few – Noah and his family – when the waters covered the highest mountain for more than 150 days Noah sent out a dove. If found no place to rest. A second time a dove was sent forth and returned with a freshly plucked olive leaf. a third time the dove was sent forth and it did not return – it had found a new beginning.

I like to think it was that dove that came down the day of Jesus baptism – signaling that the flood is past and that it is time for a new beginning. With Noah though when the flood was over, right away God recognized that nothing had changed with humans. And nothing has even to this day.

But in Jesus God was planting a new creation right in the midst of the old one. Today, a new sprout begins to grow in this new creation. Landon receives the Spirit of God and the Spirit of Jesus today.

Wednesday I asked the class about what was special in Jesus as God's Son and the answer was given – power. God's beloved Son had power to heal and to walk on water and to turn water into wine. But that is not a power that will be given to Landon.

Yet there is another power in Jesus – a different sort of power altogether – the power to love. In the weakness of his dying we believe that power to love is most evident.

Landon is given this power – love. In Landon’s loving a new creation will be born – a new beginning over and over and over.

That new creation is born in your loving as well. When you give the gift of love to those who deserve your love and those who do not it is not the same old world that deserves nothing but a flood rather there is a new beginning. Heaven is opened and the dove of God’s Spirit lands once again. Amen.