

1. The Shawshank Redemption. Movie set in a prison; brutality not only amongst prisoners, but also between prisoners, the guards, and the warden. Daily routine includes period of work outside. Hoeing field, removing rocks. Dull, predictable, helps to pass the time, but not much else.

One particular day, while most everyone is outside, Andy - a prisoner, who has been assigned work in the prison library, - is unpacking boxes of donated books and records. While the guard working in the library is in the washroom, Andy puts a record on the record player, and for the first time in his many years on the inside he hears music. Wonder spreads across his face as he listens to a duet from Mozart's "The marriage of Figaro." Within the space of a few seconds Andy quickly locks the washroom door from the outside so that the guard can't get out, then he locks himself in the library office where the record player is, then he switches on the PA system so that the wonderful classical music is played over the loudspeakers situated outside above the field where his fellow inmates are working.

Imagine. One moment the men are bent over their work, then suddenly from up above they hear heavenly music, with voices soaring, coming from the sky. In unison, they stop their work, turn towards the sound, and gaze upward. Not just the prisoners, but the guards too. The music is such a surprise, a shock. Everyone is filled with awe; as they listen to the singing they are united as one. They are touched by the lost grandeur of creation, suddenly present. It is a moment of pure wonder, breaking in upon a harsh world.

2. Now when all the people were baptized, and when Jesus also had been baptized, and was praying, the heaven was opened, and the Holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, "You are my Child, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased."

We can imagine the long line-up of people, waiting to be baptized by John, in order to receive forgiveness for their sins. One by one they are dunked in the river Jordan, re-surfacing to breathe the air, scramble for the river bank and dry off in the day's sun. Jesus is at the end of the line; he is one of them. Only when *he* re-surfaces, he is praying, and the heavens are opened. Surely the crowds of people all turned as one when they saw the Holy Spirit coming down in the form of a dove. We can imagine the hush that fell upon the people, when a voice came from heaven and spoke: You are my beloved child.

This is no ordinary, everyday occurrence. This is a unique experience, not understood, nor at first questioned. An experience that provokes wonder, amazement, awe.

3. times in our lives

birth - might expect mother / father / sister / brother holding the new baby for the first time to feel an outpouring of love for the new creation in their hands. The parents, grandparents, siblings, can also feel that they too are a new creation, poised at the beginning of this new relationship, accepting this amazing new being into the family, taking on a wondrous responsibility. There also is an experience of knowing what it means to be called Beloved by God.

When we live day by day awake to the world around us, with a sense of anticipation and curiosity, we are likely to encounter something of the holy, some sign of the divine. We notice something different, or discover a new way of looking at something familiar, and - mysteriously - we find we are different, we ourselves are unfamiliar. As we take delight in the world around us, we can know God taking delight in us.

Even at the low points of our lives the Holy One interrupts us, interrupts our preoccupation with events beyond our control, interrupts feelings of hopelessness and despair. **In the midst of grief**, the offering of a gift, and its acceptance with a smile, and a sudden deep connection with the Holy in the midst of it all.

Church community - challenge, comfort, companionship, reminder of who and whose, confirmation that yes, there is a heavenly voice naming us Beloved.

At certain stages of our lives we might pause, and ponder the question, "what is life all about?" We can talk about the facts of our life to date; things we've done, places we've been, our friendships, and achievements; harder to talk about life's meaning. But if we stay with the pondering, settle down into it, and don't shrug it off, a quiet peace and deep acceptance can descend upon us.

4. Beginning of Jesus' ministry. Not end, not encouraging part-way through. God's intervention = beginning of a new thing. Every moment is to begin life anew.

5. Joan Baez: You are / Amazing / Grace. / You are a / Precious / jewel. / You - / Special / Miraculous / unrepeatable / Fragile / Fearful / Tender / Lost. / Sparkling / Ruby / Emerald / Jewel / Rainbow / Splendor / Person.

6. Shawshank redemption: music from beyond, resonates with something inside, that has to do with being fully alive, fully human, awake to full range of human experience, awake to profound connection with Creator. Let it be so for us as we recall J's baptism; as we recall our own.

PRAYERS

In the silence, name me.

Thanks for revelation - Scripture, Jesus, creation, church, reason, experience.

Thanks for belonging - to you, family, friendships, neighbourhood, earth, country

Thanks for longing, yearning, hunger that urges us to change, to strive, to wait, to pray, to hold, to work, to pray some more. Longing for ourselves, for people we know and love dearly, for places and people further away where there is anguish, pain, violence, loss, despair. Pray for people and places where love is breaking through against all odds, where there is healing, transformation, commitment to the common good, a vision of peace.

Holy One, untamed by the names I / we give you, in the silence name me / us, that I / we may know who I am / we are, hear the truth you have put into me / us, trust the love you have for me / us, which you call me / us to live out with my / our sisters and brothers in your human family, with all my / our relations throughout creation.