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Christian Perspectives: Going on a journey

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Do you like to travel and go on a journey?

If so, you have to figure out where you want go, how you are going to get there, who you want to journey with you.

In other words, it is not a passive experience.

When the time comes to begin the journey you are excited, but perhaps slightly anxious. Have I brought what I need? Is all in order? Oh dear, my bag is overweight, the plane is delayed, I can't find my-passport, where did I put it?

These lines we have to stand in are endless!

But, at last I arrive, but then I find more challenges: the ocean is too rough, I am being knocked over by the surf, so I have to swim in the pool; I get sick and end up with the zika virus?

Oh my, all these challenges that are confronting me.

As I am on my way home, I can't help but ask myself if I had known the challenges I would have to wrestle with on my journey, would I have gone?

And my answer is ? yes: My traveling companion has been wonderful, the pool was so refreshing to swim in, it lifted my spirits with the sparkling clean water, the doctor so kind and caring, the hotel staff thoughtful. All those seen and unseen supported me. I even had some interesting conversations with folk as I stood in those endless lines. Perhaps I was in the company of a multitude of saints! What a journey.

This past Sunday, many church communities around the world celebrated the Baptism of Jesus.

John the Baptist had been calling people to repent of sin and be baptized. This was not historically part of the Jewish tradition. The Jews were God's chosen people, not in need of the cleansing with water in terms of baptism.

The ritual was only for those who converted to the Jewish faith. However, some scholars believe that at this particular time in history something unique was happening within the Jewish community: new insight. For some, there was a sense of having to repent and be cleansed.

John the Baptist was part of this when he says to Jesus, ?I need to be baptized by you and do you come to me??

The question has often been asked why Jesus was requesting baptism. I have found no satisfying answer to this other than to identify him: ?THIS IS MY SON, THE BELOVED ONE, IN WHOM I AM WELL PLEASED? as the spirit like a dove descends on Jesus. We hear in Isaiah the prophet proclaim ?Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen in whom my soul delights; I have put my spirit upon my servant; he will bring justice to the nations.?

We hear in this why it is that God has sent his servant to us: to be justice seekers/makers.

So far we have before us two images: one of journey and the other of baptism. But, are they two images or can we say that baptism is also about journey? A journey which is also fraught with challenges, times of celebration and joy, and times of struggle, pain and suffering.

In my tradition, baptism is about belonging. It is the doorway into the Christian family. It can be where the journey begins. But if we are to be justice seekers, as we are called to be in Isaiah, justice building it is not an easy journey.

In my tradition it has been a struggle for women to be accepted as ministers, gay marriage to be celebrated within the community of believers, accepting children at the table of holy mysteries. There has been struggle, pain and suffering along this journey by the baptized community who make these decisions.

Even now, some baptized Christians celebrate and others cry out in pain at the decisions the church makes.

Do you remember the time when the church prohibited anyone who had committed suicide from being buried in church sacred ground?

One can ask is all this struggle and suffering worth being a member of the Christian community as the church wrestles with a variety of issues.

But surely this is the journey within the embrace of life. Life is mixed with celebration, pain, struggle and love. As a baptized community we, need to struggle with the challenges that come before us as the baptized community of believers.

That is why we need to support one and other.

As Christians we need to reach out beyond our own church family and be a caring community to all of life. We may not always agree with one another around issues such as gay marriage, abortion, women priests. But, through our baptismal vows, we are called to love one and other as neighbours on the journey towards justice, justice for all.

May we continue to see all as our sisters and brothers.