

Into Our Depths He Dove: the Gomez Addams Model of Baptism

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Matthew 18:1-5

At that time the disciples came to Jesus and asked, "Who, then, is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?"

He called a little child to him, and placed the child among them. And he said: "Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, whoever takes the lowly position of this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. And whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me.

Gomez Addams: [One](#), [Two](#), [Three](#), [Four](#).

Gomez Addams is a member of the Addams Family, originally a newspaper cartoon filmed for TV and cinema in the last century. In the films I remember from my childhood he is portrayed by the Puerto Rican actor Raul Julia, and in recent years this character has become something of an icon of positive masculinity. His fans note that Gomez wakes up each morning thrilled to be alive, thrilled to be a man, delighted in his tall spooky wife and his gruesome children, his shambling mansion and oddball family tree, excited to get in a swordfight with his accountant and lavish affection on everyone he meets.

Gomez Addams fully immerses himself in life. He is never bored. Whatever he does, he does completely - parenting his children, serenading his wife, playing with his train set, welcoming strangers like they were old friends. He reminds me of the portrait that Jesus paints of the Prodigal Father, who throws away his dignity and his inhibitions and his pride and reserve to welcome home his beloved son. He reminds me of Jesus placing a child in front of his disciples as 'the greatest in the kingdom of heaven'. To welcome such a person is to welcome the fullness of God. To become like a child is to seek the kingdom of heaven. There are worse role models than Gomez Addams, who follows his heart towards delight.

We would like to think that we would welcome God's new reality, running out to meet it, spending all our money to buy the field hiding such a treasure. And we do

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yearn for God's reign, the one alternative to the despair and treachery of this present age. But it is hard to live your life with the intensity of Gomez Addams. It is hard to sacrifice the safety and grandeur of adulthood and take the place of a child.

But this intense and unwavering 'yes' is the path. However it is that we know God, we know God first and foremost in the person of Jesus, the Word Made Flesh, Lady Wisdom incarnate. And Jesus is a dive-right-in sort of person. The Incarnation of Jesus is God diving into their creation, agreeing to all the terms and conditions of a mortal life, a life of laughter and tears, family and intimacy, a life of moral challenge and social constriction, and a life with the potential to change the plane of reality. In other words, the very human life that we are all learning to live within.

Jesus dives right into his baptism. John has been calling the people to turn their ways around and offering them the symbol of baptism, and Jesus seeks to begin his ministry with this sacred immersion in the waters of the Jordan River. This river is the boundary between the wilderness where God taught the formerly-enslaved Hebrews how to be free. God taught their generation to rely on the ever-generous and ever-present Spirit of Life, to let go of the ways of domination and control that slavery had taught them. In the epic past of the nation of Israel, the community crossed the River Jordan to enter into the land of their promise.

Of course, nothing is ever as simple as crossing a river. Violence followed. Entering into a place of empire, and following the directions of their fierce desert God, the people left behind bodies, ruins, and deserted streets, resisting the temptations of power by killing those ensnared in domination. It is a hard question, and there are many ways to try to answer it. Our way is Jesus. Like his ancestors, he approached the Jordan river. He humbly submitted himself to John, and dove in, immersing himself in the land itself, in all of its stories and its pain and its unresolved questions. And he

emerged, and dove right into the Wilderness, a 40-day retreat to bring him into alignment with God. And then he threw himself into the work of ministry.

Unfortunately for the metaphor of Jesus diving in, after this point he mostly seems to walk on water, or make use of boats, and leaves the swimming to others. But I hope you have got the point. Through his incarnation Jesus said the largest possible 'yes' to human being. And violence followed. But this time, the uselessness of violence was shown for all time in his broken body. And today we see that useless violence against the bodies of the small, poor, and defamed.

When Jesus taught his disciples to welcome children, and when he showed them that the child was the greatest in the kingdom of heaven, he was continuing this great movement, leaping in and within and down and into. Jesus tells us that he is the child, the prisoner, the outcast, the hungry, and that we can meet him and give him honour through these neglected and unseen individuals.

But there is one more movement to consider. After descending down into our persons, and our struggles, and the grave, and the waters, Jesus rose again to new life. And when we baptise a fellow child of God, we witness them not just immerse themselves in the true life on earth, but we show our trust in God to raise them up, and to raise all creation, so that no one remains disenfranchised, under-resourced, hungry, or afraid. Imagine a world where we could all take that for granted.

In the choice to seek baptism, we step down into the flowing story of faith, trusting in God to raise us up. You don't need a theology degree to say 'yes' to God, 'yes' to life, and 'yes' to the unending adventure of living meaningfully in a world of misunderstanding and petty cruelty. Life is for loving. Just ask Gomez Addams.