

“My Beloved with Whom I am Well Pleased”

Matthew 3: 13-17

In preparing for this Sunday, I decided that the best place to start would be to see what all the Gospels say about Jesus’ baptism. Three of the four Gospels actually tell the story of this wondrous event while the Gospel of John alludes to it. In Matthew, Mark, and Luke, we get a first-hand account of Jesus rising out of the water, a first-hand account of the Holy Spirit descending upon him, a first-hand account of the voice speaking from heaven, naming, claiming Jesus as God’s own Son. In John’s Gospel, we get more of an assumption of a baptism and not necessarily a baptism of water. John the Baptist sees Jesus and knows he is the one who is to come. John the Baptist tells the crowd that he saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove upon Jesus, then he heard a voice speak to him directly and basically say, “Pay attention to this guy. He is the one you’ve been expecting”.

Okay, I’m paraphrasing John the Baptist a bit but all of this is to say that if three of the four Gospels tell stories of Jesus’ baptism and the fourth one alludes to a baptism, maybe not of water but certainly a baptism of the Spirit, then we as people of faith should sit up and pay attention. Sure, we may not agree on the details of how we live this practice out. Some churches practice infant baptism.

Others like our tradition immerse the whole person in the water. As people of faith, we may not agree on the details but we know that if all four of the Gospels talk about, allude to, or even reference a particular event in the life and ministry of Jesus, then we should probably pay attention.

I think we can all agree that there is something about the moment when the water touches our heads. There is something significant about this event that names us and claims us as God's very own. There is something elemental and necessary for us as people of faith in this rite and ritual we practice called Baptism.

As I shared earlier in the week, I have a love/hate relationship with this Sunday. Don't get me wrong. This is one of my favorite worship services that we do. It is humbling and rewarding to dip everyone's hands in the water and remind everyone that "You are God's Beloved in whom God is well pleased." But I struggle every year to try to come up with something new to say about this sacred, holy moment. I feel like a broken record. I go to commentators and get their advice. I talk to fellow preachers to figure out what they do. But still...I struggle.

Over the years, I have come to realize that my struggle lies not with the text. My struggle lies with the moment.

Let me explain. As a preacher, we know that there are difficult texts to preach within our Bible. There is the Near Sacrifice of Isaac. There is the whole

thing with David and Bathsheba after he sees her bathing and decides to have her husband sent to the front lines where surely certain death awaits him. There are whole chunks of the Old Testament and yes, even the New Testament, that say just weird things and our job as the preacher is to take these difficult texts and make them relevant for us as people of faith today.

It is a task I signed up for. It is a task I knew I was taking on when I decided to go into ministry but what I didn't expect is what do you do as preacher when the text can basically preach itself? There is nothing that I can add to this text that tells us of Jesus' baptism, there is nothing that I could change of this text that tells us of this transformative moment, to make it more powerful, more relevant, more life-giving than it already is. So what is a preacher to do?

Well, after eleven years of doing this service, I have come to a conclusion. "Don't preach. Let the waters of new life tell the story."

You see, this story of Jesus' baptism that can be found in Matthew, Mark, and Luke, that is alluded to in the Gospel of John tells us everything we already need to know as people of faith: We are God's Beloved with whom God is well pleased.

Now we know the story doesn't end there. All the Gospels go on to tell us more about the life and ministry of Jesus and yes, we better pay attention but this, this moment, this moment when Jesus comes up out of the water., when the Holy

Spirit descends upon him, descends upon us, this is our starting point for our journeys of faith. This is the moment that shapes us and transforms us into the people God created and calls us to be...people of hope, people of grace, people of love.

As the preacher, the lesson that I have learned, especially on this Sunday is that my job is not to add to this moment, because honestly, if I tried, I would simply be detracting from the mystery, lessening the gift, pulling us away from the extraordinary holy moment that this moment when the water touches our skin, washing us clean, renewing our hearts really is. No my job here today is very much like what John the Baptist's job was all those years ago. It is to stand up here and prepare the way...to prepare the way for the water trickle down into our brokenness, to trickle down into our hurts, my job is to prepare the way for the water to seep down into our very souls so that the seeds of God's love can take root in our hearts, so that the words of hope, the words of promise, the words of grace take root in our very souls. No, My job today as the preacher is to step back and let the moment be, to let the water envelope our hands as we hear the voice of God speaking to us from a place deep in our hearts, inside our souls, deep inside our Spirits, hearing God's voice telling us once more that we are loved more than we can imagine by a God who has named us and claimed us as God's very own.

So that is exactly what I am going to do. In a few minutes, everyone will be invited to remember our baptisms, to remember what it was like to emerge from the water, to remember what it was like to have the water on our fore heads and to remember God's promises made to you that day.

This invitation to remember is extended to all those who are here, because, even, if we have not be officially baptized by water, as people of faith we have been baptized by God's Spirit. At some point or another, we have all heard the words spoken to us by our God, naming us and claiming us, even if that moment is today.

In a few moments we dip our hands in the water, whether this is the first time you felt the waters of baptism upon you or it is the thousandth time, let us Remember that we are claimed and named as God's Beloved in whom God is well pleased. Let us remember that we have been transformed and that our lives are called to blessings for others.

Let us remember that from the moment we emerged from the waters, we were called to live a life based on the principles of the Kingdom of God. Let us realize that our mission in life is God's mission for the world: to bring love, healing, comfort, justice and peace for all of God's creation.

Remember our call as one of God's children to bring hope and grace to all that are hurting. remember our call as one of God's servants to support those

around you on their journey. remember our call to pray for one another and to pray for God to nourish our spirits.

As we dip our hands in the water, Remember who we are. Remember whose we are. We are God's Beloved, named and claimed as one of God's own, loved more than we could ever imagine. Amen.