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Luke 3:15-17, 21-22

God wants us to …

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Luke 3:15-17, 21-22 New Revised Standard Version

As the people were filled with expectation, and all were questioning in their hearts concerning John, whether he might be the Messiah, John answered all of them by saying, “I baptize you with water; but one who is more powerful than I is coming; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand, to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his granary; but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.”

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 Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.”

 A week ago Saturday we had two weddings at the church and it was such a fun day. As I was driving home, I was wondering what I love most about being a pastor. Weddings are pretty high up there. But I think I love funerals more. I know that sounds weird, but it is such an honor and privilege to honor someone’s life. When I say the words, “ashes to ashes, dust to dust, in sure and certain hope of the resurrection to eternal life through our Lord Jesus Christ,” I feel God’s presence all around me and I hope and pray that the family that is grieving feels God’s presence as well.

 This Sunday as we celebrate Jesus’ baptism and remember our own, I was thinking about baptisms and the joy of baptizing a young child or an adult. And I thought of the first baptism that I did. A woman in my church came to me and asked if I would baptize her granddaughter. I said, “Of course,” but I didn’t realize that she had a granddaughter. I learned that she was worried if her granddaughter would be accepted at the church because her granddaughter was half black and half white. I told her that I thought the church should be the first place that her granddaughter was welcomed and accepted and loved. When I held that precious girl, Raven, and poured water on her head in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit I prayed for Raven’s future, that she may never know discrimination.

 Baptism is when we profess and embrace our Christian faith outwardly. We are acknowledging and celebrating God’s call on our lives. After someone is baptized, this prayer is prayed for them, “May the Holy Spirit work within you that having been born through water and the Spirit you may be a faithful disciple of Jesus Christ.” In baptism we have an opportunity to feel God’s Holy Spirit upon our life, and to feel safe, comforted, and at peace.

 I love baptism because we are acknowledging God’s presence, but I also love baptism because of all of the other people who are there. We are surrounded by the community of faith, people who have encouraged, supported and affirmed God’s call on our lives. I think of Jesus’ baptism, he was baptized by his cousin John the Baptist, and they were surrounded by followers in John’s community.

 Jesus’ baptism marks the beginning of his earthly ministry, and is an affirmation of who he is and why he has come. He is baptized and the heavens open and the Holy Spirit descends like a dove and a voice proclaims, “You are my Son, the Beloved, with you I am well pleased.” It reminds me of creation in Genesis 1 when the earth was a formless void and a wind from God, the Hebrew word is ruah, comes over the waters of creation and God saw that it was good and God was well pleased .

 So we have just remembered baby Jesus born in a manger and we fast forward 30 years because baptism is how Jesus begins his three year journey to the cross. At his baptism Jesus is affirmed and named and claimed by God for all to witness. In baptism we are affirmed, named, claimed, celebrated and renewed by God for all to witness. Today is a day for us to remember that claim that God has on our lives.

 In the United Methodist Church, baptism is one of two sacraments, the other being Holy Communion.  As Methodists we believe that baptism is an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace.  Baptism is something that God does for us and within us.  It is a celebration of the grace of God that is already present and working in the person who comes to the water of baptism.  So, we baptize people of all ages from 0 to 100 because we know the gift of grace that is there before the person can know or comprehend it.

In the United Methodist Church, you can use a lot of water (pouring), you can sprinkle a little water (sprinkling), or you can even get dunked (immersion)! It doesn’t matter how it is done, what matters is the symbol of the water showing that God claims each of us as God’s own and that God’s grace is here. In the United Methodist Church we also only baptize one time, because we believe God shows up the first time you are baptized and that is more than enough. But we can remember and celebrate our baptism each day.

It is sort of a like a wedding ring. It doesn’t matter what size it is or what kind of metal it is, whatever it looks like it means that you are married. You can take it off and you are still married. No matter how baptism is done, there is a permanent water mark on your forehead and on your life that you carry with you at all times to remind you to whom you belong. Baptism is a lifelong promise made by you or made on your behalf and that promise is a covenant between you, your family, God, and your church community. On your baptism day you are adopted into the family of God so that you might live your life to honor and glorify God.

Now some people might think that Baptism is a special pill, and that after you are baptized life is easy sailing. Has anyone ever been told that “God wants you happy”? Or maybe you have even said those words yourself. “God wants you happy.” It sure does sound good to me. But, God never said that. God wants us blessed, but that doesn’t mean that we will never get sick, we will never lose a job, or we will never get a zit before a very important date. It doesn’t mean that things will always go our way, life isn’t like that. But God wants us to remember that we are called and equipped by God to make a tangible difference to the little corner of the world in which we find ourselves.[[1]](#footnote-2)

 And when we mess up, God can take away our sinfulness, our brokenness, and our shame and wash them away each day because we are a new creation in Christ. We are sons and daughters of God and we are this is a lifelong journey of faith with God and with each other. Thanks be to God, Amen.

Baptismal Renewal:

Today I invite you to the font- to remember, to celebrate, to be reminded that God has named, claimed, and poured upon you grace and mercy.  Come and remember your baptism. If you have not been baptized, you are still invited to come forward, place your hand in the water, receive a blessing, and discern whether or not you would like to receive the sacrament of baptism at some future time.  If you do, I hope you will come and talk to me about it and we will celebrate God’s call upon your life.  We come to the font for many reasons- some of us will come filled with joy at the way God shows us grace, some of us will come wanting that fresh start or second chance, some of us will come seeking answers to what lies ahead in our faith journey.  Wherever you find yourself today, you are invited to come to the font where God invites each of us and calls us by name as baptized and loved children of God.

1. http://www.davidlose.net/2016/01/baptism-of-our-lord-c-expecting-the-messiah/ [↑](#footnote-ref-2)