

“You Are Mine”

January 11, 2015

God Revealed series – Baptism of the Lord Sunday

While praying one day a woman asked, “Who are you, God?”

He answered, “I Am.”

“But, who is I Am?” she asked.

He replied, “I am Love. I am Joy. I am Strength. I am Safety. I am Shelter. I am Power. I am the Creator. I am the Comforter. I am the Beginning and the End. I am the Way, the Truth, and the Light.”

With tears in her eyes she looked toward heaven and said, “Now I understand. But, who am I?”

God tenderly wiped the tears from her eyes and whispered, “You are mine.”

I read those words on someone’s Facebook page, and I thought of this account of Jesus’ baptism. This is a defining moment when the voice says, “You are my own dear Son...you’re Beloved...” The voice gives Jesus approval, but even more, the voice of God claims Jesus as a child, as beloved, as someone who will work for God’s purposes. Kathleen Norris writes, “God breaks through in order to speak directly to us.”

When we consider Jesus’ baptism and even our own, we’re acknowledging that we are God’s people! Baptism isn’t easy to explain. I can’t explain the wonder or the power of the water. I can’t explain the movement of the Holy Spirit. And I certainly can’t explain or predict how God will use each of us. Yet as we come to the water, we can recommit our lives to Jesus Christ and acknowledge again that we belong to God. And even if you don’t remember your baptism, God does!

I’m remembering baptism today - not mine, but Ana’s and Luka’s. They were both baptized on this Sunday when we celebrate Jesus’ baptism: Ana in January of 2005 and Luka in January of 2008 - both of them were about nine months old. Both of them brought before the congregation in Ravenna.

Now I was baptized as an infant. When my own kids were baptized, I had already baptized children and adults as a pastor. But it was those moments when I heard those words from the voice that claims Jesus: You are mine! It was when Ivan and I brought our children for baptism that I realized more deeply how much God loved them! When clergy friends poured water into the baptismal font, touched it to their heads in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, and then let them splash their small hands in the water and said, “Live in God’s grace,” then I heard God’s claim on them. You are mine!

Remember when we heard the prophet’s plea for God to tear open the heavens and come down? That was one of the times when God was powerfully present. I realized that Ana and Luka were loved by God even more deeply and completely than Ivan and I loved them. The promises we made to God and the congregation that Ana and Luka would know that Jesus loves them were important. We asked for the congregation’s help us because there is no way we could do it alone. We needed support and encouragement as parents, and they promised to give it. And they did, and now we’re blessed by your support and encouragement here.

In this season of Epiphany, we’re celebrating those “a-ha!” and “wow!” moments in our lives. Jesus being baptized is one more way that he came to be with us—to be on our side. Baptism is a sacrament—a sign of God’s grace in our lives.

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Baptism is a celebration of our Christian identity that cannot be undone. It's not something we do—but it's something God does. Baptism is God's action—a sign that proclaims God's love and care for us.

It is a time when God says, “You are mine!” And we know that after his baptism, Jesus began his public ministry. The God who claims us in love is the God who calls us and sends us out to love. This God, who created all that is by sweeping a wind over the waters, is the same God who cleanses and renews us through the waters of baptism.

Helen Keller, who was both blind and deaf, said: “I knew then that ‘w-a-t-e-r’ meant the wonderful cool something that was flowing over my hand. That living word awakened my soul, gave it light, joy, set it free!” The water of baptism sets us free, too—we are free to love and serve God.

Every time someone is baptized we renew our own baptism. Today we pray for Tatum, who will be baptized during our Celebration Service - and we pray for her parents, Brad and Laura, who come to make that commitment to raise her in the ways of Christ. Yet we need to be intentional about making moments to remember and renew God's baptismal covenant with us. We need to remember our commitment to faithfulness—to strive to be who God calls us to be.

Salvation is a journey that we're on. Perhaps it began for you in a moment, or perhaps it was a series of events and God's ongoing presence. Whether you remember a specific moment or a series of moments when you understood God's love in Jesus Christ, living out that promise is a journey that we make as members of the Body of Christ, redeemed and strengthened to be faithful followers every day. Each day, we grow in grace. Each day we learn more about what it means to live as a disciple—as a follower of Jesus Christ. Each day we are spiritually formed by God's grace and mercy.

Today we have the opportunity to reaffirm our baptism. To be clear, this is not a re-baptism or repetition of baptism. It is a reaffirmation and a remembrance of God's loving action in baptism.

“Remember your baptism and be thankful.” For some of us, it's easy to remember. It wasn't too long ago—we were baptized as adults, and we can recall the feeling of the water. We can recall God's presence in a new way through the power of the Holy Spirit. For others of us, we cannot physically remember our baptism because we were baptized as infants. But, don't worry, God remembers your baptism. God was there just as God is here with us today. God calls us and claims us. We remember is God's gift of grace to us. When we touch the water, we celebrate and give thanks because God is good—all the time.

Baptism

more than grandpa's white gown yellowed by age
more than candle and towel

more than friends gathered
words spoken

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water poured
or promises spoken aloud

baptism is more
it is
sky parted peace
with heaven and earth pregnant-paused
to hear God speak the words

You are mine!

Thanks be to God. AMEN.

FOR CELEBRATION SERVICE:

We baptize infants because God’s grace is active in their lives long before they fully understand it. We United Methodists call it “prevenient grace” – grace that comes before we know it. An advertisement from one of our seminaries said, “baptism is the sacred act of childcare in church ministry.”

God makes a covenant with us. God seals the covenant with us by grace and we respond in faith and love. We remember what God has already done, appreciate what God is doing even now, and anticipate what God will do in the future. This is a first step on the journey of faith. Our prayer together - parents and congregation - is that Tatum - would grow in her understanding of what God is calling her to do and who God is calling her to be as a child of God.

And we also consider what God is doing in us, in our lives, on our walk of faith with Christ. If you took one minute to consider what God is up to right now, what is it? We are in this season of celebrating that God comes in Christ for us and for the whole world.

This is also about our part of the covenant, too – to celebrate God’s grace every chance we get. This is about following through on the commitment we make at baptism. Brad and Laura make a commitment today to be primary nurturers of faith for their children. But we make promises, too – to love, nurture, and support Tatum in her walk with Jesus Christ.

We believe that God is active in her life, and we promise to do what needs to be done to call that out for her – serving in nursery, teaching, welcoming her in worship, knowing her name, helping her, showing her what it means to serve God and love others, praying for her and for her family. We are prayer partners for her and for all these children. We are prayer partners for one another.

Friends, you see the product of God’s grace working here. Brad and Laura are newer to this church family, but they have a long connection to the larger church family. They claim their identity as children of God. They come to acknowledge God’s grace in their children’s lives now - and make a commitment to raise Tatum in the ways of Jesus Christ. We acknowledge what God is already doing in Tatum’s life and in all of our lives.

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And they ask for our support. Your care and nurture – your faith and trust – makes a difference in people’s lives. The power of the Holy Spirit working in you and through you matters, and it will continue to matter to these two who come to the water today. It will continue to matter to their parents.