

“God Speaks in Baptism”

January 10, 2016

Word of God Speak series – Baptism of the Lord Sunday

Sometimes the way that God shows up is surprising. Sometimes the way that God speaks is unexpected. I was watching a show called “Jane the Virgin” of all things. It’s long story based on a Hispanic soap opera, but there was this episode where Jane’s son, Mateo, was to be baptized. In Jane’s family, the church is important. Tradition is important.

Jane’s mother and grandmother passed down a letter that her grandparents wrote when Jane’s mother was baptized. It was read when Jane was baptized, too, and now Jane reads it when her son is baptized. It was a really beautiful scene. This is the letter. You’ll see images of the three generations of mothers reading to their children:

“My precious child, these are the things I hope for you and your life:

may you be bold, may you be brave, may you be loving and joyful and kind. May you carry with you the vitality and spirit of the generations before you. Whatever you dream for your life, may you summon the strength to follow that dream. Always let your faith be greater than your fear. May you never forget, through all of life’s great adventures, through every moment of every day, that I walk beside you, cheering you on. Hoping for you. Praying for you. Loving you. And may you one day love your own child as deeply as I love you. Today and always.”

The scene made me think about how God speaks at Jesus’ baptism, especially the affirmation that Jesus receives.

Luke recounts two important voices. First, John the Baptist speaks boldly to those who come to him. He doesn’t sugarcoat, and he calls them out for assuming that their ancestry and connections would get anywhere with God. His call is to real repentance that requires real change. There’s got to be something to show for it. John’s preaching against Herod is enough to get him thrown into prison.

But then there’s the other voice. Jesus is baptized, and as he prays, heaven is opened, and the Holy Spirit comes down in the form of a dove. And a voice from heaven claims Jesus as beloved son and affirms him. For Jesus, baptism isn’t for the purpose of cleansing his own sin. Jesus is baptized to identify with us in our humanity and our sin. He joins us in a world where there is joy and sadness, sin and reconciliation. This is another way that Jesus is Emmanuel. He is God with us!

Jesus’ baptism is a powerful moment in his life, and it’s a powerful time in our lives, too. Prayer is the foundation of the movement of the Holy Spirit for Jesus and for

us. We pray for the Holy Spirit to work in us and help us be faithful disciples of Jesus Christ. It is a powerful moment to recognize God's grace in our lives – grace that has been there from the very beginning and grace that will continue to lead us.

Baptism is God's act by which we enter into covenant relationship with God. If you were baptized as an infant, your parents or guardians answered on your behalf with the understanding that they and the community of faith would surround you and help you to grow in faith and trust in God – and that eventually you'd confirm your faith. I love the line in the letter: ***Always let your faith be greater than your fear.*** For teens or adults who answer for themselves, baptism is recognition of our commitment to follow Jesus – to have faith, not fear.

We're surrounded my noise, sound, and voices, and sometimes it's enough to fill us with fear and uncertainty. But can you hear that voice of God affirming you? Can you hear God saying that you're beloved? No matter the other voices, hear God clearly.

God redeems us from sin that separates us from God when we acknowledge our need of God's saving grace. God knows us by name. God made us for God's glory. God claims us as God's own – and nothing can take that away! God desires that we accept God's grace and grow in faith.

God who speaks through John is God who calls the people to account – God who calls us to repent, turn around, and walk with God again. That's our opportunity today. All of us come with a need to acknowledge that we are sinners who stand in need of God's grace. It's a gift to accept.

The voice that names and claims Jesus as beloved claims us, too. It's vital that we hear the message of God's love for us in baptism. I hope you hear that first and foremost – that God is already well-pleased with you. There's nothing you can do to make God love you more, and nothing you can do to make God love you less. God loves you and wants you to know it!

It's vital that we know that we are God's good creation created for God's good purposes. I pray that you know that God desires your life and faith. It's vital that we understand that we are God's children. What a blessing to know that we are loved and blessed by One whose love is matchless and amazing – and it's love that never fails!

I also pray that we're challenged to go beyond that voice and recognize that the Holy Spirit is active and alive in us. One writer says that baptism is "nothing less than being possessed by the Holy Spirit." It's from here that Jesus will begin teaching, healing, and helping people to know God. But first, Jesus is driven into the wilderness.

From this image of baptism and then the dove descending on him to the desert to contend with the devil. In baptism, we are water-washed and Spirit-born, as one song says, and the Holy Spirit gifts us and sends us into ministry as we come to God in

prayer. We cannot do it on our own. Ministry is done because of the presence of the Holy Spirit. We can trust in God's help.

Celebrating baptism reminds us of who we are and whose we are as God's beloved, but there's another piece. Baptism also helps us claim our identity and then live in light of that identity. It's not just about who we are, but also how we act as God's people and how we respond to God's grace.

Do you claim Jesus as Savior? Do you trust in his grace? Does your life show Jesus is Lord? Baptism means that we understand our need for a Savior. We cannot save ourselves. We cannot earn God's grace. We don't deserve it. But we give thanks that we can receive it. Baptism also calls us to give our allegiance to Christ as Lord. We allow him to shape our lives, priorities and values - everything. Claiming Jesus as Lord and Savior means transformation and new life for us.

And all of us as a community of love and forgiveness recommit ourselves to living as faithful followers of Jesus. We call out God's love for each other. That's partly why worshiping together is so important. Baptism is witnessed in community and renewed in community where we are known and loved. We hold each in God's grace. We remind each other that we are loved by God and by one another.

Today we will remember our baptism and be thankful for God's grace. In a moment, you're invited to remember your baptism. Remember that God calls you beloved and sends you to do God's work in the world. May we pray and listen for God's voice.

Thanks be to God. AMEN.