

Come to the Font - the First Step

August 9, 2020 Pastor Heather

Matthew 3: 13-17 CEB

We don't think much about it, but for most of us, one thing that brings us to church on Sunday or has us searching the T.V. for a worship service Sunday mornings or pulling out the print copy of my sermon for the week is . . . the fact we were baptized. Some of us were baptized as infants without any choice in the matter. When a child cries at the baptismal font, it is not interpreted theologically. I want to reassure Jeremy and Jennifer of that as they have Jacob baptized in a family service later today. Private family baptisms are now part of some of the changes Covid-19 has brought.

Some of us were baptized at 10 years old because we wanted to be like our other friends at church - who talked about their "next step" in belonging to God's Family. Or some of us may have gone to a worship service where the music, the Faith Witness speaker, or a pastor said something that made us cry and want to be a stronger follower of Jesus. Some of us haven't reached that point in our lives yet, but are beginning to seriously consider it with the life challenges we've experienced the last few months.

Probably none of us fully knew what we were doing on the day we were baptized . . .so today is a good day to learn a little more about baptism. The purpose of it begins to unfold in our lives - perhaps years later - after the fact rather than before. That's how it was for Jesus too, at least in Matthew's Gospel.

The story skips from Jesus as an infant to Jesus as a 30 year old, and we don't have a clue what happened in between. One day Jesus puts down His hammer, takes off His tool belt, hangs a "CLOSED" sign on the door of His carpenter's shop, and asks "What does God want of me?" Jesus heads south and finds His cousin John, standing in the middle of the muddy Jordan, in his camel-hair baptismal robe and smelling of locusts and honey. Jesus gets in line and waits His turn. He walks out into the water, right next to real live sinners like you and me.

While 3 of the Gospels tell the story of Jesus' baptism, only Matthew records the curious conversation prior to the baptism. Jesus is eager to be baptized, but John hesitates. They stand hip-deep in the river and engage in a fervent theological debate concerning who should baptize whom. The first time Jesus speaks in Matthew's Gospel, it is to say that He needs to be baptized, because baptism will help Him learn who He's meant to be. **THAT IS THE SAME FOR ADULTS TODAY!** Amy Davis was baptized with her sons in Lighthouse Worship 1 1/2 years ago - and look where God has led her. She founded JAVA and during Covid-19 has developing a ministry out of her garage - serving others.

When Jesus leans back into the water, He believes God is calling Him to a different kind of life. When Jesus stands up, the waters of the Jordan River dripping down His face, He sees the Holy Spirit descending like a dove to rest on His wet head. The Holy Spirit comes, not as an all

consuming fire of judgment, but with the flutter of hopeful wings. A voice says “This is my son whom I dearly love, I find happiness in Him” (vs 17) CEB.

Then Jesus goes into the desert for 40 days to think about what it means to be God’s child. Jesus spends all the days and years that follow that afternoon in the Jordan River discovering the meaning of His baptism. Jesus gives everything - His dreams and deeds, His labors and His life itself. Jesus gives Himself to God’s people, takes His place with hurting people. Baptism was Jesus’ commissioning to ministry .

During the weeks before His death, the leader of the temple challenge Jesus: “By what authority are you doing this things?” (Matt. 21: 23). Jesus answers with a reference to His baptism: “was the baptism of John from heaven or not? I was baptized. That’s why I do the things I do.” In the waters of baptism, Jesus heard the Holy Spirit calling Him to speak the truth and live with grace.

So Jesus doesn’t die of old age. He dies because He takes His baptism seriously. When Jesus cries on the cross, “It is finished,” it is His baptism that is complete.

Baptisms, like most beginnings, find meaning long after the event. I remember finding my father’s baptism certificate 20 years ago in a file of old pictures, etc. It had the same cradle roll picture on it that mine had - 32 years later. I framed them both and they hang in the hallway of my home . . .God incidences like that are so prevalent in my life.

Beginnings are often easy, while finishing is often hard. The significance of any decision takes a while to emerge. Moments of initiation are meaningless until we are true to the promise of that beginning. We’re handed a map, but then we have to take the trip. It takes our whole lives to finish the journey we begin when we’re baptized.

So what does it mean to us to live out our baptisms? If we are true to our baptisms, we cannot make ourselves comfortable, cannot do only what will be appreciated and cannot be satisfied with the way things are. Our baptisms demand that we struggle with what is right and what’s wrong and what’s important and what’s not.

The children of God tell the truth in a world that lies, in a world that takes, love in a world that hurts and make peace in a world that fights. They serve in a world that wants to be served, pray in a world that wants to be entertained, and takes chances in a world that worships safety.

Baptism is our ordination to ministry, our vow to live with more concern for the hurting than our own comfort, and our promise to take issue with ideas with which everyone else agrees. Baptism is our commitment to share our time with the poor and listen to the lonely.

What did it mean when you were baptized? The meaning of your baptism is seen in what you think, feel and do this day. Have you done anything today that you wouldn’t have done if you

had not been baptized? We are forever answering that question “Why was I baptized?”

Remember your baptism and be thankful.

Let us Pray,

God of all creation, when your Holy Spirit descended on Jesus at His baptism, you called Him your beloved child. We worship you today as your beloved children. May we continue to learn what it means to love you more.

Amen.