

Hello, the Baptized!

Mark 1:4-11

Jan 10, 2021

Wow. Wow. Wow.

Where is my i-phone? I want to take a picture of Jesus' baptism at Jordan river. Isn't it an eye-catching happening? Do you see what I see? Can you see the heavens opening and the Spirit like a dove descending? Where is my i=phone? I also want to record the voice of God from heaven. Can you hear the voice of God? "This is my beloved child. I am well pleased." Eugene Peterson translates this verse this way: "This is my Son, chosen and marked by my love, delight of my life." That was what was heard at the Jesus' baptism.

His baptism reminds us of our baptism.

"Do you remember your baptism?" When did you receive the baptism? Was it infant baptism or adult baptism? Maybe many of you do not remember it because it took place when you were a little baby. You might need to see a picture or a certificate of your baptism to assure yourself that you were baptized. Some of us should remember your baptism if you received it as a grown up.

Whether remember or not, we were baptized by God's grace. We are the baptized people. And the church is the community of the baptized.

Baptism is a beginning of the new life. Paul writes, "Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life." (Romans 6:4) The Baptized people walk "in newness of life."

This morning I would like to share two important understandings on our baptisms with you.

First, baptism is the good news that **we belong to God.**

“You are my son, my beloved one.” “You are my Son, chosen and marked by my love, delight of my life.” What Jesus heard was God saying, “You are mine. You belong to me.” Whenever I do baptismal counseling for an adult or a child, I always emphasize this precious and transforming moment in Jesus' baptism.

What is baptism? Baptism is declaration to the whole world that we are claimed by God as His children and we belong to God. This is what has always been true from the beginning of God's creation and we need to be reminded over and over of this liberating and transforming and everlasting truth.

In our culture, baptism has been considered as a kind of naming and claiming ceremony for a family -- a moment when the world acknowledges and celebrates that a new child has been born to and claimed by his or her family. But the reality is that, when waters was poured over a child's head, we, the church announces the whole world that the child is actually claimed by God above all other claims--including any claim by the parents.

That claim of God becomes more and more important as we continue to journey in the chaotic world. The world constantly tries to declare ownership over us through labelling and categorizing. Who are you? Are you Republicans or Democrats? Are you native citizens or immigrants? Are you White, Black or Brown? Are you Heterosexuals or Homosexuals? Are you conservative or progressive? You are educated, You are not educated. You are too old. You are too young.

Our baptism can remind us that no one, no political parties, no institutions, no labeling in this world determines our worth in this world.

Henri Nouwen writes,

“Over the years, I have come to realize that the greatest trap in our life is not success, popularity, or power, but self-rejection. Success, popularity, and power can indeed present a great temptation, but their seductive quality often comes from the way they are part of the much larger temptation to self-rejection.

When we have come to believe in the voices that call us worthless and unlovable, then success, popularity, and power are easily perceived as attractive solutions. The real trap, however, is self-rejection. . . . As soon as someone accuses me or criticizes me, as soon as I am rejected, left alone, or abandoned, I find myself thinking, “Well, that proves once again that I am a nobody.” . . . My dark side says, “I am no good. . . . I deserve to be pushed aside, forgotten, rejected, and abandoned.”

Self-rejection is the greatest enemy of the spiritual life because it contradicts the sacred voice that calls us the Beloved.? Being the Beloved constitutes the core truth of our existence.”

Rev. Vicky Flippin, one of my colleagues in NYAC, powerfully and effectively states this baptismal truth as follows:

“To the prisoner, it means you do not belong to the bars and chains around you. You belong to God. To the addicted, it means you do not belong to that thing which you crave. You belong to God. To the dying, it means you do not belong to this body or to that cancer. You belong to God. To the patriot, it means, you do not belong to this nation. You belong to God. To the debtor, it means you do not belong to any bank or credit card company. You belong to God. To the empty and overworked, it means you do not belong to your company. You belong to God. To the depressed, it means you do not belong to this sadness. You belong to God. To the abused, it means you do

not belong to the person or the memories that hurt you. You belong to God. And even though it might feel like, look like, smell like, hurt like you belong to all these other things, as sure as water is wet and God is good, we hear a voice out of the heavens say it: You belong to God.” Yes, no one can claim over you. Nothing can snatch you away from God. Amen. Hallelujah!

Do you hear what I hear? Do you hear God singing for you and me every day? “Don’t be afraid I am with you. I have called you each by name. Come and follow me. I will bring you home. I love you and You are mine.” (FWS #2218)

Second, **baptism is ordination**. With baptism comes the Spirit, and with the Spirit come gifts and graces for the glory of God.

A father is in church with three of his young children, including his five-year-old daughter. He sat in the very front row so that the children could properly witness the service. During this particular service, the minister was performing the baptism of a tiny infant. The little five-year-old girl was taken by this, observing that he was saying something and pouring water over the infant's head. With a quizzical look on her face, the little girl turned to her father and asked: "Daddy, why is he brainwashing that baby?"

Baptism is not brainwashing, but ordination. Look at the baptism of Jesus. Baptism was ordination for Jesus. It was the beginning of his ministry and mission. After the baptism, Jesus began to proclaim the Good News to all the people, especially those suffered and those alienated, ostracized and discriminated in this world.

What he did was simply to let people know that they do not belong to this world, but to God who loves and cares about them. He let people free from the bondage of being labeled by the world.

Likewise, through baptism, we, the baptized, do follow Jesus and his ministry and mission to proclaim the good news to the world.

Many years ago, a Philadelphia congregation watched as three 9-year-old boys were baptized and joined the church. Not long after, because of dwindling membership, the church sold the building and disbanded. One of those three boys was Tony Campolo, who became an author and Christian sociologist professor at Eastern College in Pennsylvania.

Listen to this short story as Professor Campolo tells it: "Years later when I was doing research in the archives of our denominations, I decided to look up the church report for the year of my baptism. There was my name, and Dick White's. He's now a missionary. Bert Newman, now a professor of theology at an African seminary, was also there. Then I read that church's report for the year of our baptism. It read: 'It has not been a good year for our church. We have lost 27 members. Three joined, and they were only children.'"

Now, not everyone who is baptized grows up to be a Tony Campolo or a Seminary professor like Bert Newman. And while we might not go on the mission field far away from home like Dick White, we all become missionaries at where we are, here and now.

Some years ago, a Scottish minister told his congregation about dreaming he had died. When he came to the pearly gates, to his dismay, he would be denied entrance until he presented his credentials. Proudly the Pastor articulated the number of sermons preached and the prominent pulpits occupied. But Saint Peter said no one had heard them in heaven. The discouraged pastor enumerated his community involvement. He was told they were not recorded. Sorrowfully, the pastor turned to leave, when Peter said, "Stay a moment, and tell me, are you the man who fed the sparrows?" "Yes," the Scotsman replied, "but what does that have to do with it?" "Come in," said Saint Peter, "the Master of the sparrows wants to thank you."

Here is the pertinent, though often overlooked, point. What we do, though it looks small and little, means a lot to the Lord.

We all have received gifts and graces to share. Some may find gifts and graces to teach or read children. Some one's gift may be building up a community vegetable garden. Some might have gifts and graces to help the homeless sisters and brothers and people in need. Some might have gifts and graces in organizing or joining a community to protest against any discriminations in our society. Some might have a great passion in writing petitions for the voiceless and the poor among us. Some might have a great passion in praying for others in need of healing.

Hello, the Baptized! Hello, beloved children of God!
What are your gifts and graces?

In the name of our triune God, God the Creator, Christ the Savior and the Holy Spirit the Counselor. Amen.