

January 8, 2012

Sermon - What do you remember?

Scripture

Genesis 1: 1-5

Mark 1: 4-11

Who remembers their baptism? Many of us were baptized as infants so we don't expect to remember the actual event. Yet we can recall the baptism of our children, grandchildren or the children in our church family. The baptism of young children is often a high point in any worship service.

My very first Baptism was done right here when I baptized Carolyn and George Creighton's grand daughter Emma Lee McFadden. What a wonderful experience, one that was spirit filled.

There are parents who desire to wait to have their children baptized until they can make the decision on their own. As United Methodists we believe in infant baptism because it is not the decision of the child, but of the parent. It is the commitment parents make to raise their child in a Christian home and in the fellowship of a Church community.

Infant baptism is a subject that people and denominations argue about, but it is not my intent to enter that disagreement. Just remember that if you wait until children have a choice, they may choose no.

Five-year-old Danny's parents had decided to have him baptized now that they believed he was old enough to understand what it was about. What Danny understood was that he was going to have to stand up in front of the whole church, listen to his parents promise to raise him in a Christian home, and then have the women in the long black robe drip water on his forehead. His response, "no way", furthermore he told his upset parents on the way home, he didn't want to go to a Christian home, he wanted to stay with them.

When we baptize infants we are pledging as parents, pastors and church family that we will do the best we can to help these growing children understand that they are a part of the Christian family. While we don't remember the actual event, we can recall the momentous meaning.

Last week we discussed the concept of Epiphany, and it is no accident that the lectionary follows the story of the Magi with the story of the baptism of Jesus. Once again we are at the center of an epiphany. Once again we are present, as the identity of Jesus is made known. In Mark's story of baptism we are present as God identifies Jesus as his own son.

So here is Jesus, standing in the water with the crowd on the banks of the Jordan River, waiting for baptism. He is about to begin his public ministry and it opens with a humble baptism that identifies him deeply with the people he has come to lead. The crowd has come from the whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem have gathered. The crowd has come to be washed of their sins by John the Baptist; Jesus has come to be recognized as the Son of God. They are all standing together in the water and this is no

accident, because what it tells us is that we to stand there in the water; we too are children of God.

One of my favorite times with my children was when they were about three and it was bath time. I would bathe them together and they loved it. Surrounded by toys and bubbles, bath time was not a chore but a celebration. And when they were fresh out of the bath water, still dripping wet, they loved to run down the hall to jump into their father's arms. Matt and Katie's dad, Mark would just beam, and hug them even if they were wet and slippery. The look on his face is just what I imagine God to look like when he looks at us as God's children. If Mark, as a human dad was capable of such a glowing appearance, I can only imagine how our God looks and feels.

Why is it important to remember our baptism? It's about the spirit. Baptized as infants the spirit was called to be present in our lives, but isn't realized until we start really living. In other words as young people and adults it is now up to us to take the promise that our parents made and turn it into a reality in our own lives. The spirit is promised now we have to take God up on that promise and live like we are truly the sons and daughters of God. Luckily for us that promise given by our parents contains a real spirit that is now present to help us. We are not alone to face the suffering, the fear, the questioning and the dark, difficult parts of our lives. Our heritage as God's children enables us to tap into that spirit as we endeavor to live a Christian life.

One of the aspects of today's scripture illustrates the help we have in God. John the Baptist is talking about that he is not the Messiah. He is there only to baptize with water but that Jesus will baptize with the Holy Spirit. Being baptized doesn't mean that life will be easier or sin free, but it does mean that we are not in it alone.

God spoke right out in the Gospel of Mark and said you are my son, the beloved, with you I am well pleased. This pronouncement started Jesus' ministry. It wasn't going to be easy. It isn't easy for any of us.

An ancient Christian catechism describes baptism as a "visible sign of invisible grace." By the grace of God, we are surrounded and upheld every day. The great Protestant leader Martin Luther was plagued at times by a sense of unworthiness and despair. To drive back those demons, he kept an inscription over his desk that read, "Remember you have been baptized." Often, he would touch his forehead and remind himself, "Martin, you have been baptized."

As I read this while preparing this message for you, I touched my own forehead. It reminded me that in a physical way that I too have been baptized and the spirit is present. Those of you that have not been baptized are in no way devoid of the spirit. Baptism is only an outward sign of an inward desire to be in relationship with God, and partake of the grace available for all.

Here is a way to remember our baptism or our personal commitment. Think of the three things present the Son, the Spirit and the Servant.

We believe that Jesus was a **son** of god. Believing that makes all of us sons and daughters of God. We are loved by God and given the gift of belonging to his earthly family and promised a place in life eternal. When we accept the anointment of our baptism we offer our thanks for being a part of the family.

Once anointed either with water or spiritually, we are not left alone to struggle in the world, but are in constant companionship with the **spirit**. The Holy Spirit, is our companion as we live this life. This Spirit is available to all, the presence of God here on earth.

Finally we become the **servant**. Blessed by God as sons and daughters, surrounded by the holy spirit it is now our responsibility to live out this inheritance. It is our responsibility to resist all evil, and to uphold good. We are called to live lives that are modeled on our idea of who Jesus was. Many of you may have read the book, *In His Steps*, by Charles Monroe Sheldon, which was first published in 1896. It is a novel in which a portion of a community commits to try to live like they imagine Jesus would in their community, at their jobs and with their families. It is like the original concept of the popular saying "What would Jesus Do?" I had to read it for my ethics class at Iliff as an example of a prescriptive style of ethics. Basically it represents a "how to live manual." The difficulty is in translating Jesus life in 30 common era to 2012. As servants of our God, we are able to make changes not only in our own lives but also in the lives of others. We are able to affect change in our homes, communities and the world.

So why do we remember our baptism either literally or figuratively? Because we never want to forget who we are and who we belong to. We are the sons and daughters, who are filled with the spirit and become the servants of our God.

Today we are celebrating the baptism of Jesus, and we are remembering our baptism which symbolizes that God claimed us as sons and daughters in a lifelong covenant. I am inviting you to be a part of this ritual. It does not matter if you have been actually baptized or not. Enjoy the ritual! Feel free not to say words that may not yet apply to you. If you would like to know more about the life of discipleship and about being part of the baptismal covenant, be sure to speak with me or our lay leader Bev Allen.