

Baptized Into

Mark 1:4-11

Second Sunday after Pentecost, (Jan. 14) 2018

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For those of us who go by the name Christian, the journey begins right here in the water – in baptism. Who we are, what we are to do with our lives begins when we know whose we are. We are Christian. We belong to Christ. From the waters of baptism everything else about us flows.

When we are baptized into Christ, we are baptized into his death, buried with him, so that just as he was raised from the dead; we too might walk in newness of the resurrected life. Our vocation is to follow Jesus Christ. We might end up being lawyers, or doctors, or teachers, or carpenters, or therapists, or nurses, or mechanics, or husbands or wives but each of those come out of our first calling – we are Christian. We follow Jesus Christ.

When we step into these waters we are stepping into following Jesus Christ and we do not know where it might take us. We step into something larger, something deeper, and something older than we realize. We join our lives with the Movement of God going on all around the world. It is the Movement for peace, for justice, for healing, for goodness, and reconciliation.

Mark's account of Jesus' baptism is typically brief, concise, and focused on action. He doesn't explain much. What he does is let the story itself explain. Jesus enters the waters of the Jordan River to be baptized by his cousin John. He comes up out of the waters and the heavens open up and the Spirit of God in the form of a

dove descends on Jesus. When Jesus rises from the water, all that separates heaven from earth is torn asunder and united in Jesus. Then Jesus walks out of the Jordan River and walks into the life and ministry that God has prepared for him. In Jesus, the God Movement gets started and all of the rest of us join it when we are baptized.

Today, we've baptized Hailey Davis and she too comes out of these baptismal waters to join the God Movement. We do not know what that life might look like yet we do know that her calling and her commitment is to follow Jesus Christ whatever else she does, to walk alongside others in the God Movement and to participate in the healing, loving, forgiving, serving, peacemaking, justice-making work of God.

Today you have joined up.

My dear friend Nancy Sehested, who has preached here several times, was 11 years old in the fall of 1963. She and her family lived in Dallas. In Sept. 1963 (Sept. 15) there was news of the terrible hate-filled crime of the bombing of Sixteenth Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, AL in which four little girls were killed. One of the girls, Denise McNair was the same age as Nancy – 11. In the newspaper and then in some magazines were pictures of Denise and her three friends who had been killed. Nancy saw one of the pictures and Denise had the same coat on with a Peter-Pan collar that Nancy wore. She had the same curly bangs that Nancy had. She went to a Baptist church like Nancy did and sang in the children and youth choir just like Nancy. Denise and Nancy were alike in almost every way except the color of their skin. Nancy cut out the photograph and put it in her Bible. And every night, Nancy read her Bible, looked at that picture, and

prayed that God would use her to be a peacemaker.

After a few weeks, Nancy decided to write a letter to the President of the United States about peacemaking and race. She wrote to President Kennedy and told him of her concerns and asked him to do more about it. She also said that she knew he was very busy and if he needed any help she was available.

A few weeks went by and she did not hear anything back. Finally, in November, President Kennedy was visiting Dallas. Suddenly that morning, school was canceled and parents were picking up their children and taking them home. When Nancy got home the whole family was in front of the television – President Kennedy had been shot. And later she learned that he died.

In the midst of it all, her Mother remembered, “Oh, Nancy, you have a letter today from the White House.” Nancy opened the letter from Lee White, Special Counsel to the President, who said, that President Kennedy had received her letter and thanked her. Furthermore, that the President was committed to helping end racial prejudice and he was grateful for all she could do, too.

Nancy kept the letter. But more, she kept the photo of Denise McNair, and still has it to this day. All of these years later, Nancy is still aware of her kinship, her connection with Denise McNair, and all of these years later Nancy is still committed to being a peacemaker and working for the justice of God. She is still a member of the Movement of God.

And now, Hailey Davis, so are you. In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. One True God, Mother of us all. Amen.