

Sermon

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Baptism of the Lord

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As a Pastor, we look at the importance of church in people's lives. For some, it is a focused time to be in prayer; for others, the church community is a way to live out God's mission and ministries in our communities. But lately, the church, at least to me, has become a destination event. People come to church for two or three important things in their life. The two most frequent are baptisms and funerals and for some, maybe a third, a wedding. While all these events are important and incredibly special, there is more to living out a life of faith. This journey of faith is all centered on that of baptism.

Do you remember your baptism?

In today's reading from Mark, Jesus is baptized. The question that has been pondered by many scholars and theologians is why? Why did

God's son need to be baptized? This part of today's reading gives us all a glimpse into what God wants us to do which as faithful followers we are not above or below anyone, but are all sinners in need of cleansing. Jesus got in line with all the rest of the followers of John the Baptist. There was no hoopla or big entrance recognition of Jesus. He was just one of us. But at the same time, the person doing the Baptism has already stated that he was not worthy to untie Jesus' sandals. But Jesus saw the need to be cleansed in the waters of baptism just like all of us, to get a clean start as we enter into our faith journey. Later on, in the service we will renew our promise made at the time of our baptism that others made for us when we were little.

In the writings of Mark, we get a special picture of the one who baptized Jesus. John was dressed funny and ate some really interesting things. Why was this description important to the message? John wasn't the picture of a priestly person dressed for success and dining with the important people in the religious world of Judea and Jerusalem. God works through people we might not see as the perfect ones. God works

through those that believe and want to share the message of God's love and forgiveness. John also knew and shared that he was not "the one" talked about in the writings of the Prophets. There was someone more powerful that will be bringing the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit, one part of the Triune God...the one part that is hard to describe to a nonbeliever. How do you describe something you cannot see, smell, taste, or even feel? Yet, it moves us along in our lives and faith journey. I like to tell you a story of how the Holy Spirit talks and moves us in our lives.

Story of the right-hand search.

The Holy Spirit took on a special importance in today's Gospel. The Holy Spirit descended on Jesus; this event is very important, that just being splashed with water at baptism is not enough. We need to be open to this Spirit that is loose in our world and waiting for us to become active in the mission of Christ. There is a paragraph in one of the

commentaries I study when I prepare to write my sermons and messages and it gave me insight into the church and the Holy Spirit.

Do our churches and its peoples depend on the Holy Spirit and our connection to God in prayer for the spiritual stamina to go out into the world and our communities? Does the Holy Spirit give us the strength and guidance to make a difference in peoples lives through Christ?

Prayer is that communication line, that vital link that connects every disciple (all of you), every congregation and every ministry to God.

It is up to each one of us to put that movement that the Holy Spirit uses into action, by loving our neighbors, helping where and when we can, going out and sharing God's message with our communities and finally helping make disciples. But all this action starts with a conversation with God; then, being open to the movement of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

The last line in the Gospel from Mark is a very appropriate one for all of us. When God spoke directly to Jesus saying "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you, I am well pleased"

God was showing us to lift up and be proud of those that we call brothers and sisters in Christ. I know when I talk as a parent about our children, I am very proud of where they have gone in their lives and the great young men that they have become. Also, as a parent I am not blind to the bumpy and pot holed journey that got them all to where they are today, but I am still very proud of them.

As we go about our week to come, I encourage you to take some time to pray and have a conversation with God. Then to be open to hearing what God has to say and how the Holy Spirit will move you. You might just be surprised with the reply and direction that you are guided down.

Remember that we are His beloved and with all of us, he is well pleased.

Amen.