

FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

East Moline, Illinois

Pastor Becky Sherwood

January 12, 2020, The Baptism of the Lord

Psalm 42:1-9, Matthew 3:13-17

I AM BAPTIZED!

And when Jesus had been baptized, just as he came up from the water, suddenly the heavens were opened to him and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased."

As we enter 2020 and a new year opens up before us, the story of Jesus' baptism in the Jordan river invites us to remember our Baptisms.

As we stand at the beginning of a new year that will hold another presidential election, whose news can't be avoided in any news cycle.

As we stand at the beginning of a new year whose daily news brings us joy and sorrow, and often confusion

As we stand at the beginning of a new year that will bring unknown joys and sorrows to each of us, and to our family and friends, and to all of us as a church family,

I think it's important for us to remember and name who we are as God's children.

The gifts of our baptism unfold throughout all the days of our lives, and I believe that remembering that we are God's beloved sons and daughters at the beginning of this year can shape the ways we choose to live and speak and act and make choices in 2020.

If you were baptized, as an infant in your parent's arms, as a teenager, as an adult, whether water was sprinkled on you, or poured on you, or you were immersed in a pool or river or lake the pastor spoke words over you: "I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit."

And in that moment of Baptism your life was changed because the words spoken over Jesus are for each one of us as well: We are God's beloved children, God's daughters and sons, and God is well pleased with each one of us. In our baptisms we join the Family of God and are connected to the heart of God.

So, this Sunday I am going to invite you to join with me in a "Service of Reaffirmation of our Baptismal Covenants."

Baptism is a sacrament; it is sacred and holy. For us as Presbyterians it is one of two sacraments, the other being the Lord's Supper that we will also celebrate this morning.

One way to understand the word sacrament is that it is "an outward sign of an inward grace."

The outwards signs: the water that is placed onto our heads, or the bread is broken and the cup is poured, are the things we see.

While the water is poured, while we eat the bread and drink the cup, God's grace is taking root in us.

The sacraments are pathways the Holy Spirit uses to shape and guide our lives.

"An outward sign of an inward grace."

The reason that Baptism and the Lord's Supper are our two sacraments is because we believe Jesus gave them to us: As he was baptized, we are baptized.

And as Jesus served his disciples the Last Supper in the upper room the night before his crucifixion,

he continues to serve each of us his body and blood
whenever we eat the bread and drink from the cup as we will do this morning.

When we are baptized the minister is using the words Jesus gave us when he told us to go out and invite people into the faith and then baptize them in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

When we are baptized, and also when we witness someone being baptized, we are being shown God's love and grace for us.

Part of what makes infant baptism so powerful is that we are seeing how God's grace is for us
before we speak a word,
before we make a choice for faith,
even before we can understand what it means to follow Jesus.

Before we do anything, God does everything!

We love God, because God loved us first!

God chose us first, and in our baptisms named us as Beloved Children of God!

In Baptism, and throughout the days of our lives,

God says: "You are my beloved child (no matter what your age) and you belong to me"

God says: "You are my beloved child and nothing can separate you from my love.

It is a gift I will always give to you."

In baptism we are connected to the heart of Christ, the Holy Spirit lives in our hearts and we become members of the Family of God. Then for the rest of our life journey we live into those truths as we walk the path of faith.

Whenever there is a baptism, a profession, or promise, of faith is made. A confession of faith in Jesus and the desire to be his disciple is always made.

For infants and young children this is done by their parents on their behalf.

For older children and youth and adults, they make their own profession of faith.

We make a covenant with our God.

As Presbyterians we believe that baptism isn't a private sacrament, but a sacrament that takes place right in the middle of the family of faith. Baptisms take place in the middle of a worship service, because we are being baptized into God's family.

As you are learning about baptism today, and have not yet been baptized, I encourage you to consider being baptized here in worship with us. Just talk to me today after the service and we can arrange for that service to happen for you or for your children.

(cf: The Book of Common Worship, PCUSA, pp. 403-406)

Today you are being invited to take part in a service of reaffirmation of your baptism. This is not a service of being re-baptized. As Presbyterians we believe in only being baptized one time. This is a service of naming again our commitment to faith in Christ, and a life spent following our God. It is a time to remember that we are baptized, we are God's beloved sons and daughters, God's Holy Spirit lives in our hearts, we are part of the Family of God, God is well pleased with each of us.

What a powerful way to start a new year! These promises will guide our path into the coming year.

A Service of Reaffirmation of Baptism is an ancient service, used by the early Christian church. In the last 30 years or so, many Protestant mainline denominations, including the Presbyterians have reclaimed this ancient service and begun using it again.

Participating in this service is completely optional today. It is a time for you, if you so choose, to name again your faith in Jesus, and your desire to follow him.

If you have not yet been baptized, it is still very appropriate to make these vows with the rest of the congregation today as a statement of your faith.

What happens in a Service of Reformation of Baptism is that we
once again name our desire to turn away from sin
and toward faith in Jesus Christ.

And we name again our commitment to being disciples of Jesus Christ
in our daily lives.

I invite you to take out the insert with the Presbyterian symbol, you'll find in your bulletin that is entitled: "A Service of Reaffirmation of Your Baptismal Covenant" on the cover. I invite all of you who would like to reaffirm the promises you made in your baptism to join together for this service.

As we conclude this service, we will sing two hymns together and you will be invited to come forward to receive a symbol of your reaffirmation of your baptism, or your reaffirmation of your faith.

You'll be invited to reach into the waters of baptism and take one of the stones you'll find there.

I hope that you will put this stone in a place where you will see it. Put it in your wallet,
your backpack, on your desk or dresser, inside your car, or your locker at school

Each time you see the stone

may it remind you that you have made promises to be a follower of Jesus,
and each time you see it may you know again that you are a Beloved Child of God.

Whenever you see or hold this stone, I hope you will say the good news to yourself:

"I am baptized, I am a beloved Child of God, and God is well pleased with me."

And now if you so choose, I hope you will join me in the: Service of Reaffirmation of Baptism.

A SERVICE OF REAFFIRMATION OF BAPTISM

SCRIPTURE SENTENCES

1 Corinthians 12:12–13, 2

Just as the body is one and has many members,
and all the members of the body, though many, are one body,
so it is with Christ. For in the one Spirit
we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—
and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.
Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.

PROFESSION OF FAITH

Sisters and brothers in Christ, our baptism is the sign and seal of our cleansing from sin, and of our being grafted into Christ. Through the birth, life, death, and resurrection of Christ, the power of sin was broken and God's kingdom entered our world. Through our baptism we were made citizens of God's kingdom, and freed from the bondage of sin. Let us celebrate that freedom and redemption through the renewal of the promises made at our baptism. I ask you, therefore, once again to reject sin, to profess your faith in Christ Jesus, and to confess the faith of the church, the faith in which we were baptized.

RENUNCIATIONS

(Before answering the first question, you will be asked to stand as you are able and face the back of the sanctuary. You can also do this from your seat, turning so you are facing the back). This is an act of worship that comes from some of the earliest days of the Christian faith being practiced. It is symbolic of turning our backs on sin and death and evil.)

Do you renounce all evil, and powers in the world which defy God's righteousness and love?

All: I renounce them.

Do you renounce the ways of sin that separate you from the love of God?

All: I renounce them.

PROFESSION

Do you turn to Jesus Christ and accept him as your Lord and Savior?

(Before answering this question, you will be asked to face back to the front, which symbolizing turning to Christ.)

All: I do.

Will you be Christ's faithful disciple, obeying his Word and showing his love, to your life's end?

All: I will, with God's help.

THE APOSTLES' CREED

With the whole church, let us confess our faith.

Minister: Do you believe in God the Father?

All: I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth.

Minister: Do you believe in Jesus Christ, the Son of God?

All: I believe in Jesus Christ his only Son our Lord; who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried; he descended into hell; the third day he rose again from the dead; he ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead.

Minister: Do you believe in God the Holy Spirit?

All: I believe in the Holy Ghost; the holy catholic Church; the communion of saints; the forgiveness of sins; the resurrection of the body; and the life everlasting. Amen

THANKSGIVING FOR BAPTISM

The Lord be with you.

All: And also with you.

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

All: It is right to give our thanks and praise.

(Unison)

Glory to you, O God--your voice is over the waters, full of power and majesty. Your word shakes the wilderness and blesses us with peace.

We give you thanks and praise for the new thing you have done in Jesus Christ our Savior. Baptized by John in the Jordan, you anointed him with your Holy Spirit, and claimed him as your beloved Son.

We give you thanks and praise that by the grace of our baptisms, you have claimed us as well

and poured out the gifts of your Spirit so that we might be dead to sin and alive to you in Christ Jesus.

Continue to pour out your Spirit upon us. Empower us to love and serve you and live as your faithful people, bearing witness to the good news of Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Minister: Remember your baptism and be thankful.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

All: Amen!

RECEIVING A SYMBOL OF BAPTISM AND THE REAFFIRMATION OF OUR BAPTISMAL VOWS

Beginning with the choir, please come forward to the front of the church and receive a symbol of baptism and the reaffirmation of our baptismal vows. For those who are unable to come forward, this will be brought to you. Please join in singing as people come forward, please remain seated until just before it is your turn so you can help with the singing. Two of you can come up to the bowl at a time!

Then, please return down the side aisles.

Hymn #490 *Wash, O God, Your Sons and Daughters*

Hymn # 482 *Baptized in Water*

Practice, after all have received their stones: I invite each of you to hold onto your baptismal stone and repeat after me: "I am baptized, I am a beloved child of God, God is well please with me!"

BENEDICTION: Poem: Blessed are you who bear the light

Blessed are you

who bear the light
in unbearable times,
who testify
to its endurance
amid the unendurable,
who bear witness
to its persistence
when everything seems
in shadow
and grief.

Blessed are you

in whom
the light lives,
in whom
the brightness blazes—
your heart
a chapel,
an altar where
in the deepest night
can be seen
the fire that
shines forth in you
in unaccountable faith,
in stubborn hope,
in love that illumines

every broken thing

it finds. © Jan Richardson from Circle of Grace: A Book of Blessings for the Seasons. janrichardson.com