

“Remember Your Baptism”

Date: January 11, 2015

Place: Lakewood UMC

Text: Mark 1:4-11

Occasion: Baptism of the Lord

Theme: baptism, Jesus' baptism, grace

Today our text from Mark's gospel is about the baptism of Jesus. Baptism is one of two sacraments in the United Methodist Church. Other churches have more than two, for instance the Roman Catholic Church has seven.

For us, baptism is a sacrament for two reasons. First, it is a means of grace. That is to say, it is an action that we perform, but in which God Himself is active to show us God's love and mercy. The second reason we consider it a sacrament is because Christ himself participated in this act when he was alive.

Some people question why Jesus was baptized. They wonder *why*, if he was sinless, he needed to be baptized. Maybe the answer isn't as complicated as we make it out to be. One theologian I read put it quite simply, and I like his explanation. Oscar Cullman wrote:

“It was not a baptism of repentance for His sin; it was a baptism of repentance for MY sin, and for yours. Just as Jesus died on the cross, not for his own sin, but for yours and mine, so also he was baptized in solidarity with you and me.”

What was Jesus doing when he was baptized? By going to John to be baptized, by joining with other people who were acknowledging that their lives were totally messed up and empty and uncertain, Jesus publicly demonstrated the meaning of Immanuel.

God is with us. God has come to us. God has joined us in this world, in our human condition, in our human predicament. God

understands. God knows what life and death are really like for you and me. Jesus, the sinless one, was baptized so that he could identify with you and me.

You and I are baptized so that we can identify with Jesus. You see, when we are baptized, we die to our old way of life, and we begin a new way of life. We are no longer our own person, we belong to God.

But baptism is not the end of our spiritual journey, it is just the beginning. Some people think that once they've been baptized, then they're saved and that's it. They've arrived; they've got their 'after-life insurance policy.' But no, baptism is just the beginning of an exciting new life. Baptism is a fresh start, not the final destination.

By the way, do you remember your baptism? If you were baptized as a young adult, you might remember it. But if you were baptized as an infant, as happens to most United Methodists, you probably don't remember your baptism.

And so, it's easy to forget this exciting new life that we've been baptized into. It's easy to forget our rebirth by water and the Spirit, a rebirth that transformed us once and for all, a rebirth transforms us every day. Do you remember *your* baptism?

Arron Chambers in his charming book, *Remember Who You Are*, tells this story: "A little boy was visiting his grandparents, and he was given his first slingshot. He practiced in the woods, but he could never hit his target. He went back to Grandma's back yard, where he spied her pet duck.

On an impulse he took aim and let his little stone fly. The stone hit its target and the duck... fell dead. The boy panicked. Desperately

he hid the dead duck in the woodpile, only to look up and see his sister watching. Sally had seen it all, but she said nothing.

After lunch that day, Grandma said, “Sally, let’s wash the dishes.” But Sally said, “Johnny told me he wanted to help in the kitchen today. Didn’t you Johnny?”

And she whispered to him, “Remember the duck!” So, Johnny did the dishes.

Later, Grandpa asked if anyone wanted to go fishing. Grandma said, “I’m sorry, but I need Sally to help make supper.” Sally smiled, “That’s all taken care of. Johnny wants to do it.”

Again she whispered, “Remember the duck!” Johnny stayed while Sally went fishing.

Several days went by in just this fashion – Johnny was doing both his chores and Sally’s. Finally he couldn’t stand it. He confessed to Grandma that he had killed the duck.

“I know, Johnny,” Grandma said, giving him a hug. “I was standing at the window and saw the whole thing. Because I love you, I forgave you. I was just wondering how long you would let Sally make a slave of you.””

What’s *your* duck?

What “duck” do you keep remembering? What duck do you keep letting remind you every day of your shortfalls and shortcomings? It is so much easier to remember our sins than to recall our salvation. It is easier to see the cracks and broken places in our lives than to feel the strength of God’s Spirit that has glued us back together.

It is no coincidence that immediately after Jesus’ own baptism,

Satan appears on the scene to tempt him. But while Satan tempted Jesus to show his true strength, Satan tempts *us* to give in to our old weaknesses.

Satan whispered into Jesus' ear, "Remember the duck." Satan whispers into our ear: "Remember the duck!"

"Remember, you're a liar." "Remember, you're a cheater!"
"Remember, you're a loser!" "Remember, you're an addict!"
"Remember, you're a failure."

And we all have a Sally in our lives, too, people who constantly tell us "Remember the duck!" They like to keep us in our place, remind us of our shortcomings, and tell us, "Remember the duck!"

Don't listen!

Instead of "Remember the duck!" we need a new whisper in our ears, a new wind that blows telling us, "Remember your baptism!" In fact, whenever we hear the "remember the duck" voice, we need to beat it back with these words: "Remember your baptism!"

Remember God's grace. Remember the waters of repentance and re-birth. Remember the ongoing gift of the Holy Spirit that beckons us into the world, to do the impossible for God and the gospel. Remember your baptism!

In just a few minutes we're going to do a baptismal remembrance. We'll all come forward and touch the water. When you do, remember that God loves you, forgives you and wants you to forget about that duck, whatever that means for you. Remember your baptism, and be glad! Amen? Amen! Let us stand and sing, # 252.

Adapted from a sermon by Leonard Sweet: "Remember Your Baptism."

