### “You Are My Son” Steve Finlan for The First Church, January 12, 2025

**Acts 8:14–17**

14Now when the apostles at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had accepted the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them. 15The two went down and prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit 16(for as yet the Spirit had not come upon any of them; they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus). 17Then Peter and John laid their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit.

**Luke 3:18–23**

18 With many exhortations, John proclaimed the good news to the people. 19But Herod the ruler, who had been rebuked by him because of Herodias, his brother’s wife, and because of all the evil things that Herod had done, 20added to them all by shutting up John in prison.

21Now when all the people were baptized, and when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, the heaven was opened, 22and the Holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, “You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.”

23 Jesus was about thirty years old when he began his work.

In reflecting on our lives here on earth, some have said we are in training, as in a life-long class, learning to become human. We are expected to go through certain experiences, pass through all the grades that our peers pass through. In a way, it helps us to understand each other, knowing that we’ve had similar experiences. In the Scriptures, we’re going to see Jesus going through an experience that his peers went through. He did grow up and learn the Scriptures like any other Jewish boy.

The first event in our Scriptures is the last part of the Luke reading, the baptism of Jesus. Why did Jesus submit to John’s baptism, the baptism for repentance from sins, when he had no sins? In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus tells John that he needs to be baptized “for it is proper for us in this way to fulfill all righteousness” (3:15). This needs some exploring, as its meaning is not obvious. I think he means that he has to go through what his fellows go through, living the fully human life. He needs to be baptized to fulfill that mission of commonality with his fellows, not because he has any sin of which he needs to repent. And so he undergoes what they called the baptism of repentance.

In his case, it results in the voice of God speaking publicly, or at least in the hearing of John (see John 1:33), proclaiming the divine sonship of Jesus, and in the Spirit visibly descending upon him. This marks the beginning of Jesus’ public ministry. What happens next varies according to the different gospels. In John, after the baptism Jesus begins to gather disciples, starting with the brothers Andrew and Simon Peter. According to Mark and Matthew, right after the baptism he goes into the wilderness and is tempted by the devil, and then starts his public ministry and gathering of his first disciples. According to Luke, after the baptism he is tempted in the wilderness. Then he goes to Nazareth (his home town) and gives a powerful message, but is rejected. From there he goes forth and begins his ministry.

The baptism and the confirmatory voice from heaven seem to mark the very beginning of his ministry in all four gospels. It’s as though he has finished the fully human part of his life, undergoing baptism like other humans. But then, at the baptism, he is dramatically revealed as the Son of God, and his ministry starts manifesting signs of divine power.

The voice from heaven is the first miraculous sign. Jesus is not only identified as the Son, but as the Beloved. There is love within the Godhead. The Father loves the Son. And we see from Jesus’ life that he loves the Father. An important lesson for today is that there is a circulating love within the Godhead, which then flows out toward us. This love and acceptance is freely given to all who would receive it.

Not long after the baptism, Herod arrests John, who had criticized much of Herod’s evildoing, including Herod’s marriage to his brother’s ex-wife, which was against Jewish law. We know what will happen to John while he is in prison. And so, his baptism of Jesus was one of John’s last public acts.

In Acts of the Apostles, we see that some Christians “had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus” and had not yet received the Holy Spirit (Acts 8:15–16). Apparently baptism needed to include the *naming* of the Spirit, and the recipients of baptism needed to be told to *expect* to receive the Holy Spirit, and then they could receive it. When they received the Spirit, they experienced power and energy, and some would start taking on the gifts of the Spirit: prophecy, exhortation, tongues, interpretation, healing, discernment. A lively experience of these gifts was a part of life in the early church. Presumably, the Samaritan Christians also started experiencing the gifts of the Spirit after they were re-baptized by Peter and John.

My experience of the Spirit involves truth-discernment, a feeling of spiritual warmth and intimacy, and confidence about the supreme values in my life. I don’t have the more miraculous gifts like tongues, prophecy, or healing. My experiences have more to do with a feeling of spiritual rightness and a feeling of being loved.

What are your experiences of the Spirit? Do you have that feeling of spiritual warmth that I mentioned? Do you have confidence in your values? Essential to our spiritual journey is that we seek to align our *values* with God’s, which also means aligning our *will* with God’s will. Do you pray, “help me to do your will”? That, I think, is an essential result of having received the Spirit, that you *desire* to align yourself with God’s way. In a very small way, then, God could say that *you* are his beloved, too, and *you* are his son or daughter, too, not to the same degree and quality as Jesus’ divine sonship, but of a quality that is appropriate to our humanity, and to which we should aspire. As John wrote, “we are God’s children now; what we will be has not yet been revealed” (1 John 3:2). We are all a work-in-progress, living and learning in the school of love. We will make mistakes, but we will learn needed lessons as we grow God-ward.

So, regarding Jesus, know that truly he is the Divine Son sent to reveal God to us and to awaken us to our sonship with God. Regarding yourself, know that you are a child of God, loved by your Father, and endowed by your Creator with factors of spiritual growth. Unless specifically hindered by dishonesty or selfishness, growth *will* happen. And this growth happens overnight, you know not how. Just as earth children grow, the children of God grow.

So while the Scriptures today had mainly to do with Jesus’ baptism, John’s arrest, and the baptism of Samaritans, it ends up conveying a message about *our* spiritual lives. We should have some gifts of the Spirit, too, even if they are not overtly miraculous. But then, every act of love is a kind of miracle. And as the Grateful Dead used to sing, “I need a miracle every day.”

The Apostle Paul taught that baptism should mark the beginning of new life for us, putting away behaviors of the past. Baptism means that now “we might walk in newness of life. . . Sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace” (Rom 6:4, 14). Imagine that! Living under grace, experiencing a miracle of love every day. Receive God’s love and walk in newness of life!