

“Remember, Renew, Rejoice!”

Date: January 12, 2020

Place: Lakewood UMC

Text: Matthew 3:13-17

Theme: Baptism

Occasion: Baptism of the Lord Sunday

A small country church was having a “baptizing” in a river on a cold January day. A revival had just concluded. The preacher asked one of the men who had just been baptized: “Is the water cold?”

“Naw, it aint cold,” the man replied. To which one of the deacons of the church shouted, “Dip him again, preacher. He’s still lyin’!”

In a few minutes we are going to have a couple of baptisms. But we Methodists do not generally, as a rule, dunk our candidates, though we sometimes do. However, Jesus was immersed in the Jordan River.

In the little joke that I told, the deacon recognized that a change of life is called for after baptism. Many people question, though, why Jesus was baptized. If he was sinless, why did *he* need to undergo baptism? It’s an interesting question.

I’ve heard it explained this way. Jesus was not baptized for the forgiveness of HIS sins; rather he was baptized in solidarity with you and me. It was a baptism of repentance for my sin and for yours. Just as Jesus died on the cross, not for HIS sin, but for ours, so also he was baptized in solidarity with you and me. He was baptized on behalf of you and me.

By this act, of him going to John to be baptized, Jesus joined with the people who were acknowledging that their lives were messed up, empty, uncertain and in need of a fresh start. In his baptism, Jesus demonstrated the meaning of Immanuel, God with us.

God has come to our world. God has joined this world in our human condition, in our human predicament, and God understands us. God gets

us, to use a common phrase today. God knows what life and death is really like for you and me. God identifies with us. God is one of us.

In baptism, Jesus drew near to us so that we could be like him. In our own baptism, we draw near to Jesus, to join him in his death, so that we might share his life and become like him.

Today you will hear the words, “Remember your baptism and be thankful.” That doesn’t mean we remember the actual events of the day we were baptized. Rather, it means we remember *that* we were baptized.

When Martin Luther, the Reformer, was suffering from depression, he held on to his faith and life by repeating to himself, “I have been baptized.” How could remembering his baptism give Luther power over his inner darkness? Perhaps it was the fact that his baptism marked a specific time when he had been declared a child of God.

At Jesus’ baptism, a voice from heaven said, “You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.” At our baptism, by God’s grace, we too are declared God’s children. We too are declared God’s beloved.

Baptism has other related meanings as well. Water gives life. Psalm 107:35 says, “He turns a desert into pools of water, a parched land into springs of water.” The water of baptism symbolizes the new life God offers. Jesus said, “Those who drink of the water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life.” (John 4:14)

Water can also bring death – as we have witnessed after hurricanes or tsunamis. Thus baptism symbolizes dying to our old selves and rising to new life with Christ. Paul wrote, “When you were buried with him in baptism, you were also raised with him through faith in the power of God, who raises him from the dead.” (Colossians 2:12)

Perhaps the most familiar meaning of baptism to most people is that

of cleansing, the washing away of sin. “John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.” (Mark 1:4)

And one last meaning of baptism – baptism symbolizes the outpouring of Christ’s Spirit which binds us together. “For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body.” (1 Corinthians 12:13)

Today, we will celebrate the sacrament of baptism, baptizing five young people, in total, at our two services this morning. Today we will also remember our own baptisms. And in each case, whether we are doing a baptism or remembering our own, all of these meanings are caught up in the act of baptism.

Remembering your baptism means daily returning to the waters, daily putting to death your old ways, daily taking up your cross, and daily renewing your life in Christ. Baptism is not the end of the journey. Baptism is not magical water that automatically makes one a saint or guarantees entry into heaven.

Baptism is merely the beginning of the journey. And each of us must remember our baptismal vows, and continually work at fulfilling them. Today we will be baptizing five children, some only a few weeks old, others several years old. They need the love, care and nurture – not only of family but also of their faith community.

When these children are baptized they are not full-grown, mature Christians. They must be taught the faith. And for that they need good role models, they need good teachers, and they need good examples of what it means to be a Jesus-follower.

You can spend time with these or any of the children of our church – in Sunday School, (at our Faith Sharing event at 9:45); in Vacation Bible

School. I invite you to learn the names of our children – let them know who you are; let them know you care about them. Share in their lives. Learn what they're interested in and then ask them the next time you see them about that activity.

Share your faith experience with them – such as times when you saw God in nature, or a time when God helped you with an everyday problem. Pray for these kids; they have a tough world to grow up in right now. Be an active member of this church – let the children see that the Christian faith is still important to people when they grow up.

Let them see what faith in action looks like. When we share joys and concerns, share how God has been active in your life, or how you saw God active in the world. Let the children know that God is alive and well and working in your life. They need to hear your testimony. That way, they will learn that the Christian faith is not merely a fairy tale, or something that only happened a long time ago.

Baptism is an act which looks forward to lifelong growth in Christian faith and life. Much of what baptism signifies, from the washing away of sin to the pouring out of the Holy Spirit, will need to keep happening during the course of a lifetime. It is to be expected that there will be further and deeper experiences of God, and further acts of definite Christian commitment.

Today, we remember Jesus's baptism; we remember our own baptism. Today we renew our baptismal vows. And today we rejoice in the lives of these five young people who put their feet on the Way, the pathway of following Jesus. Today, God claims them in a special way to be a Beloved son or daughter of the Almighty God.

Remember, renew, rejoice in your baptism. Amen.