

FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

East Moline, Illinois

Pastor Becky Sherwood

January 13, 2019, Baptism of the Lord

Luke 3:15-17, 21-22, Isaiah 43:1-7, Call to Worship: Psalm 29

I AM BAPTIZED!

INTRO TO ISAIAH READING

In this morning's reading from Isaiah we are listening to ancient words of promise that came to desperate people.

The Israelites had been in exile in Babylon back in the 6th century B.C.

This is ancient history, but it reaches out to any of us who have felt far from home.

They had been marched over 900 miles from their home in Jerusalem to Babylon. For over 48 years they were in captivity. Throughout all of those years the Prophet Isaiah spoke God's words to them. They had heard God's judgement and they had heard God's love.

In Isaiah 43 they heard God's promise that they would be going home.

They heard God's promise that wherever they were lost, God would find them.

They heard God's promise that they were not forgotten.

Listen for the word of God, spoken to the Israelites over 2600 years ago,

and spoken to us this morning in our own places where we feel lost and far from home.

Baptism. What comes to mind when you hear that word?

Do you remember your own baptism, and what it was like to feel those waters being placed on your head? Or do you remember being immersed for your baptism, or led down to the river, or a pool or a pond?

Do you remember the feeling in your heart as you took vows of faith and named yourself as a follower of Jesus?

Baptism. When you hear the word do you wonder if now is the time for you to be baptized?

Baptism. Do you remember holding your beloved child on their baptism day, dressed in that baptismal gown that had been passed down through the family? Or dressed in that special outfit you'd purchased for the day.

Do you remember what you felt in your heart as the minister asked if you were a follower of Jesus Christ, and if you would raise your child to love and follow Jesus?

Baptism. Are you a grandparent, who remembers the overwhelming love and pride as your grandchild was carried, or walked to the front of the church?

Do you remember what you felt in your heart as your child, holding your grandchild, named their faith in Jesus and their desire to raise your grandchild to love and follow Jesus as you do?

Baptism. Do you remember watching the minister take your child or grandchild in their arms? Or the minister looking into your eyes as you stood or kneeled by the baptismal font?

Can you hear again the ancient words given to us by Jesus in Matthew 28, words that are new each time they are spoken, each time water is placed on the head of an infant, child, teenager or adult:

“I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.”

Our new Book of Common Worship adds that the minister may make the sign of the cross on the baby’s or child’s or adult’s forehead and say these words:

“..child of the covenant,
You have been sealed by the Holy Spirit in baptism,
And marked as Christ’s own forever.”

What a perfect picture of what happened to you and to me when we were baptized. We were made part of the covenant between God and humanity, a covenant of love.

We were sealed by the Holy Spirit, meaning we were given the gift of God’s Holy Spirit,
And we were marked as Christ’s own forever.

I think it’s easy for us to think of our baptism as something that’s a part of our history, but not something that is a part of our life.

It’s something that happened when we were infants in our parent’s arms, or it was part of our confirmation, or a one-time event in our lives as adults.

But our baptism isn’t just something from the past, it is part of this day, this time, this moment. In our baptism we were made part of God’s covenant of love that is a day by day love for us.

We were blessed with God’s Holy Spirit who lives in our heart, moment by moment.

We were marked as belonging to Christ forever. Every single day, heartbeat by heartbeat we belong to Christ.

We heard this morning that when Jesus came up out of the waters of the Jordan River the heavens opened, and the Holy Spirit descended on him in the form of a dove and God spoke from heaven: “You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.”

What I am telling you this morning is that those words weren’t only for Jesus then, they are for you and for me in our own baptisms, and in each of our lives.

God says to each of you and to me every single day

You are my son, you are my daughter,

My Beloved,

With you I am well pleased.”

God speaks these words to you!:

You are my son, you are my daughter,

My Beloved,

With you I am well pleased.”

And that changes everything! In all that our lives hold, we have a promise to hold onto. In the ups and the downs, in the joys and the sorrows, in the fear and despair and uncertainty, we are God’s loved daughters and sons, and God is pleased with us.

There is a wonderful story I heard in seminary about the power of this promise. The Reformer Martin Luther, back in the 16th century was a man of deep faith, and also a man who struggled with that faith. The story is told that Luther was staying in a castle in Germany translating the Greek Bible in German so that the ordinary people could read the Word of God for themselves. But while he did this he struggled with doubt and discouragement. When he felt most overwhelmed he would say out

loud: "I am baptized." It's said you could hear him shouting it around the castle grounds. "I am baptized."

I was reading an article by the Lutheran Pastor Nadia Bolz-Weber this week and she says: "If you have ever experienced sudden discouragement in the midst of healthy decisions, or if there is a toxic thought that will always send you spiraling down, or if there is a particular temptation that is your weakness then I make the following suggestion: take a note from Martin Luther's playbook and defiantly shout back at this darkness "I am Baptized" not I was, but I am baptized.

<https://sojo.net/articles/how-say-defiantly-i-am-baptized>

Where in your life do you need to hold onto this promise that is yours?

Not "I was baptized" as an infant but I don't remember it,
not "I was baptized" on this date but that was a long time ago,

But "I am Baptized"...

Right now, I am a beloved child of God

Right now, I have the gift of God's Holy Spirit living in my heart,

Right now, I am Christ's forever and nothing can separate me from the love of Christ.

Right now, "I am baptized!"

Please make this phrase your own. Shout it out when you need to, or whisper it to yourself on the hard days. Share it with other baptized children of God. Put it on a piece of paper in your wallet, or on your bathroom mirror or in your car. I am baptized.

We, the beloved children of God, holding onto these strong words: "I am baptized," have been given other strong words to carry with us from this place. They are some of my other favorite words of comfort for the difficult days. You'll find them in your bulletins on the yellow insert that I invite you take out now.

We who have passed through the waters of baptism
and been claimed as God's own,
are given the promise that God is with us.

The Israelites of long ago were given God's promise that is for us this morning
Whenever we feel exiled and far from home, God will bring us home.

Wherever we are lost, God will find us.

When we feel forgotten God says: I know you, do not be afraid,

No matter what is overwhelming us, God is with us, and is more powerful; God's love is stronger.

I hope you will take these words from Isaiah 43 home and put them where you can see them.
Or take them home and give them to someone who needs to be reminded of this promise from God.
I'd like us to end by reading these words together this morning.

Let us read God's living promise:

Isaiah 43

Now thus says the Lord,

the One who created you...

the One who formed you:

Do not fear, for I have redeemed you;

I have called you by name, you are mine.
When you pass through the waters,
 I will be with you;
and through the rivers,
 they shall not overwhelm you;
when you walk through fire
 you shall not be burned, and
 the flame shall not consume you.
For I am the Lord your God,
the Holy One of Israel, your Savior...
Because you are precious in my sight,
 and honored,
 and I love you...
Do not fear, for I am with you.