

***“You Are My Beloved with Whom I Am Well Pleased”***

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John 3:15-17, 21-23

Over the years, I have had the privilege of officiating in many baptisms. In each baptism I began by setting the stage with Jesus’ words, *“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you.”* (Matthew 28:18, 19) This is our Great Commission: **make disciples....baptize them.....teach them!** Today, on this *Baptism of the Lord* Sunday, we will reflect on Jesus’ baptism and the meaning of our own baptism.

Jesus was baptized in the Jordan River by John the Baptist. You will recall that many people came out to the Jordan to be baptized by John and many wondered if he was the long awaited Messiah. But in our Gospel reading you will hear John refuting any notion that he was the Messiah.

**Read Luke 3:15-17, 21-22**

15 As the people were filled with expectation, and all were questioning in their hearts concerning John, whether he might be the Messiah,  
16 John answered all of them by saying, ‘I baptize you with water; but one who is more powerful than I is coming; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. 17 His winnowing-fork is in his hand, to clear his threshing-floor and to gather the wheat into his granary; but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.’

**The Baptism of Jesus**

21 Now when all the people were baptized, and when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, the heaven was opened, 22 and 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.’***       **The Word of the Lord.....**

I have no doubt that Jesus was encouraged by God's baptismal affirmation every day of his life. When he was being tempted in the wilderness, when he was arguing with religious people who just didn't seem to understand grace, when he was dealing with self-centered and cantankerous disciples, when he was enjoying a party at Lazarus' home, when he saw the spark of faith in the Phoenician woman, when he was betrayed and hanging on the cross, and the day of his resurrection, I can picture Jesus harkening back to his baptism, "***You are my beloved with whom I am well pleased.***" What a tremendous comfort Jesus' baptism must have been to him through the roller coaster of his life. The same can be true for us!

The sacraments of the Lord's Supper and Baptism are God's grace gifts to us that we might remain strong in our faith. They are "means of grace" and have been accurately called *visible signs of an invisible reality*. *Visible signs*....we can see, feel and taste the sacraments....they are *tangible reminders* of an *unseen reality*....the spiritual reality of God's grace, presence and commitment to us. A voice from heaven proclaims, through the sacraments, "***You are my beloved with whom I am well pleased!***"

The great Reformer, Martin Luther, was plagued, at times, by a sense of worthlessness and despair. To drive out those demons, he kept an inscription on his desk that read, "***Remember, you have been baptized.***" Often he would touch his head and remind himself, "*Martin, you have been baptized.*"

As I prepared for this sermon on baptism, it occurred to me that I have seldom, if ever, pondered my own baptism. I appreciate the fact that my parents brought me forward to be baptized and I have rejoiced that I am baptized in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit but I've never really taken the time to contemplate my own baptism....to actually try to picture myself being carried forward to receive the sacrament. I suppose I have gotten so used to the role of *baptizer* that I have neglected picturing myself as the *baptizee*. I think this might be true for many of us who were baptized as infants. We grow up to be the "responsible ones" and we find it difficult picturing ourselves in the vulnerable role of a baby. *How many of you can remember the date in which you were baptized?* Before this week, I couldn't have told you the date I was baptized.

Speaking of dates, it seems that Baptists, who do not believe in infant baptism, have an advantage over us Presbyterians. The Baptists emphasize the individual's decision to profess faith and, after the profession, that individual is baptized. Those who are baptized in this tradition have personal memory of their baptism.

Knowing that Denise was baptized in the Baptist tradition, I inquired of her memory of baptism. I learned that she was baptized at the Oakland Baptist Church in Roanoke, Virginia in October 1966 at the age of 9. She was baptized, on a Sunday evening, with her twin sister, Dawn. Denise distinctly remembers putting on the white baptismal gown and descending into the baptistery where the water was about 4 feet deep. The pastor put his hand over her mouth and nose and gently laid her back into the water. When he brought her out of the water, he proclaimed, "***You have been buried with Christ in baptism and have been raised with Christ in new life.***" A quote from Romans 6:4. (*While Presbyterian baptism symbolizes the same thing, one can visualize being buried with Christ and raised with him in new life much easier in the Baptist tradition of immersion*)

The point is that Denise has personal memory of her baptism, knowing when, where and how she was baptized. Perhaps because of this she may think of her baptism more than those of us who were baptized as infants. Nevertheless, we are called to remember our baptism and this week I have sought to visualize my own baptism. It has been a significant experience as, with Connie's help, I managed to find my baptismal certificate. I learned that I was baptized on *May 11, 1947, by Rev. Paul E. Carson at the First United Presbyterian Church in Hutchinson, Kansas.* A bonus was to find that witnesses had also signed my baptismal certificate and my grandfather, *Charles Oyler*, was one of them.

To find this tangible reminder of that day when my parents brought me forward to receive the *visible sign of an invisible reality* has been quite moving. The whole point of remembering our baptism or simply remembering that we were baptized is to claim God's pronouncement of grace, "***you are my beloved with whom I am well pleased***"....to live with an awareness of God's unmerited favor, faithfulness and mercy and be encouraged with that reality.

Maybe this is why I appreciate our Presbyterian way of baptism because, especially in infant baptism, we are brought forward as vulnerable, dependent, and helpless babies. We are placed in the merciful and gracious care of God totally apart from our ability to act, respond or be responsible for our life. We are totally in God's sovereign care! It's all gift!

Baptism is our reminder that our life is all about God....we are God's people.....we are redeemed by Christ's death and we live by the new life given through God's ever present Holy Spirit. Baptism reminds us that our acceptance before God is not about our being able to *keep the commandments* or our *goodness* or our *dedication* or our *responsible behavior* or our *success* or even our *faith*. Baptism reminds us that our life and faith is a gift from God and God looks upon us and says, "***you are my beloved with whom I am well pleased***" because we are united with Christ. It is our identity "in Christ" that makes us pleasing in God's sight. God looks upon us and sees that we are beloved and worthy because of what Christ has done for us and our reception of his grace.

No matter how or when we are baptized, we simply receive God's blessing just as those of us, who were baptized as infants, received the sign of God's blessing with no effort on our part. How good it is to live and claim that blessing through Christ every day. Martin Luther was right on target when he would touch his head and say to himself, "***Martin, remember that you have been baptized.***" For those who might not be baptized, I encourage you to give serious consideration to saying yes to having the sign of God's love, grace and redemption sprinkled upon you. Baptism is not needed for salvation but it is a wonderful visual reminder that our life is secure in Christ Jesus.

In our Presbyterian *Book of Common Worship* we are invited to remember our baptism through a Reaffirmation of the Baptismal Covenant and, today, I will us through that Baptismal renewal service. As we reaffirm our baptismal covenant may God bless you with the assurance that "***You are God's beloved with whom God is well pleased!***"

### **Reaffirmation of the Baptismal Covenant**