

You are my beloved one. In you, I am well pleased. Amen.

It must have been a slow news day in June of 1975 because somehow, my baptism made the pages of the Pottstown Mercury. The first time my parents showed me the yellowed newspaper clipping of the top of my bald head being held by my childhood priest, I laughed a little at the absurdity.

Now, when I think of it, something is touching about the idea. In a not-too-long-ago time, celebrating meaningful rituals mattered and was considered a “special interest.”

Have you been told the story of your baptism? I wonder what was “newsworthy” about your baptism within your world? What was passed down through family lore about the experience? Who was there? Why were the godparents picked? Where did it happen? If you have someone to ask about it, I encourage you to track down the story.

Are there other baptisms you have been present for that are memorable? Why? Have you ever told that person the experience was meaning for you?

Today we remember the Baptism of our Lord. Jesus’ baptism. Each Gospel writer approaches it in a different way. Since this is the year of Luke, there’s not a lot of flower language. We see John the Baptizer speaking his truth. I’m not the one. My tools for ministering are water and hope. The one who is coming will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. Then we see Jesus getting baptized along with the whole other host of people.

The heavens open and the Holy Spirit descends “in bodily form like a dove” and we hear the sound of God. Some translations read “heard the voice” while others “speak of a sound that all could understand”. You are my son...My child... My Beloved one. I am well pleased with you. I love you. You are my one.

Jesus' baptism marked what most people consider to be the beginning of his ministry. I would argue that seeing him teaching in the temple as a child suggests that his whole life was ministry. After his baptism, what does he do? Jesus spends time with "his people," the disciples, and then goes out into the desert for 40 days. Fasting and praying. Preparing. Maybe we should take note of that in our lives - stay close to our people and take time to rest and pray.

Our baptism and Jesus' baptism are not the same. It is one of the principal days we baptize in the church, but not because it means the same thing. Jesus was baptized and named as God's son, the beloved one. We are baptized as a way to be known as a beloved one of Christ. There is a theological understanding that in the waters of baptism, we are bludgeoned down into the water in a sort of death to the old self and emerge new and redeemed. Honestly, that gets soft-peddled a bit since, most often, we baptize babies and small children in our tradition. More commonly we speak the language of being welcomed into the Family of God. Being named as a follower of Christ.

Being named as belonging to one another.

There are no scheduled baptisms today so the tradition is to remember our baptisms in other ways. We will have an opportunity to do that in a moment. But what does it mean to remember your baptism?

The prayers recall God's gift of water - in Creation, the parting of the Red Sea, and Jesus' baptism. The very real way that our story is a continuation of those sacred stories. That our lives are sacred. And how we make them "newsworthy" matters.

Baptism was a turning point for Jesus. It is a turning point for us too. In a culture that puts a heavy emphasis on individuality, Baptism speaks the opposite. We know something wholly different about ourselves through the lens of being part of the family of

God. The African concept of Ubuntu - 'I am because we are'. The holy call to be in community.

When we are called to “remember our baptism”, it is not about adorable babies in white gowns, it is about the promises that were made on their behalf.

The promises are about what we are going to turn away from and what you are going to head towards. We will renounce what we know to keep us separate from God in the spiritual realm, in the physical world, and within ourselves. And then we promise to turn toward Jesus and trust.

And then here is where community comes in.

The whole community is asked if they are going to show up in an ongoing way to help nurture that person in their life of faith. And the response is, “We will!”

So when we remember our baptism, we remember how people surrounded us and promised to -

...proclaim in our words and our actions the Good News of Jesus
Seek and serve Christ in ALL people. Loving our neighbors.
.. to strive for justice and peace among all people
...to respect the dignity of all.

I understand it is a tall order.

Our response isn't I will do this perfectly every time.

Our response is “I will, with God's Help.”

Again, God's call is always into deeper community with God and with one another.

So today, as when we recall our baptism, let us remember the promise we have as a member of the family of God. As we walk, we are continually guided and loved into wholeness with God's help.

Luke was right to name this life in Jesus a calling. A calling to our fullest self. A call to know we are part of something bigger than ourselves. And a call to put our trust in the one who God called "beloved".

After the water is splashed in baptism, holy oil is used to make the sign of the cross. This invisible yet fully realized sign is accompanied by the words, "You are sealed with the Holy Spirit and we are marked as Christ's own forever."

So when you come forward for Communion today, I encourage you to dip your fingers in the water and know you are Christ's own. Forever. Amen.