

Pastor Jon's Sermon from Sunday, January 9th, 2022

The Baptism of Our Lord

Text: Luke 3:15-22

How about a little holy humor? What do John the Baptist and Winnie the Pooh have in common? They both had the same last name. Ha, Ha.

If you said they both liked honey, you are correct.

Today we celebrate the Baptism of our Lord. It is always the first weekend after Epiphany which comes on January 6th. We ask the question, "What is being revealed about God in this simple act of Jesus being washed in water."

Have you thought about your own baptism lately and what that means to you? To me, it means that every day is a new day. The sins, hurts, and disappointments of today don't have to rule tomorrow. I am baptized and beloved by God.

For Pat Summerall, who played in the NFL with the Lions and announced Monday Night Football with John Madden, baptism marked a huge change in his life. During his CBS years he partied hard off the field. "We raised Cain," he said. I was the first guy at the bar and the last to leave." Summerall was told that if he kept on drinking he was going to die.

After checking himself into the Betty Ford Clinic, his counselor urged him to seek a better life through faith. At age 66, Pat Summerall was baptized. In USA Today he told a reporter that when the minister "leaned me back in the water, I never felt so helpless." Summerall testified, "I knew I just became a Christian. I can't tell you how great life has been since then." Summerall died in the promises of his faith in 2013.

Summerall died to the old life and rose to the new life in Christ.

In Luke's version of Jesus' baptism, it is a communal affair. Jesus gets baptized with "all the people." Jesus is among the crowds. And

crowds included all sorts of people. Jews, Gentiles, Pharisees, tax collectors, Roman Soldiers, Samaritans, rich, and poor. It was a mixed bunch. John called the crowds a brood of vipers... a bunch of poisonous snakes a few verses earlier. So, what is Jesus doing waiting in line for his baptism with a brood of vipers?

A little background... remember John's baptism is a baptism of repentance. The people are to repent of their old sinful ways and bear fruit worthy of repentance. John wanted to prepare people to meet Jesus. What did that fruit look like in Luke's Gospel? John Baptist answered... Whoever has two coats must share with anyone who has none. The same with food. Tax collectors weren't supposed to collect no more than the amount prescribed. Soldiers were not to use force to extort money from people but to be satisfied with their wages. People were to treat one another fairly and kindly and be content with what you have.

The fruit of repentance is a changed life that is generous and ethical.

Again, what is Jesus doing among this crowd? The one who was without sin is hanging out with hoarders, tax collectors, and roman soldiers? Jesus is standing among real people like you and me. He doesn't need to be baptized in order to be washed of his sins. But Jesus chooses to get baptized. Jesus has a pattern of identifying with us humans in every way. This is how God chooses to save us... by becoming one of us.

John knew that humans had history of failures, betrayals and violations of God's covenants. These failures are one way to think about our own sin. Sin is a violation of the covenanted relationships between human beings and God, and a violation of covenanted relationships between humans and other humans and all of creation.

So, God sent prophets into the world like John the Baptist to get the people to turn from their sinful ways and return to God. That didn't always work, however. People are stubborn. But now God makes a new covenant with us in the manger... God in human flesh. Jesus will come and baptize with the Holy Spirit and Fire. The Holy Spirit has the power to do a new thing like in creation. And Fire is cleansing

and purifying. Like when my parents used to use a lighter to sanitize a needle before getting a sliver out.

For Christians, that new covenant with God is initiated in our Baptism. It is a means of God's grace. Our call to follow Jesus and commit our life to him happens in our baptism. We too receive the Holy Spirit. When Jesus was baptized, the Holy Spirit descended on him like a dove, and a voice from heaven said, "You are my Son, the Beloved, with you I am well pleased."

Here Jesus' identity was affirmed, and he was called beloved by God the Father.

How does it feel when someone affirms your identity and says I love you. It feels good. In your baptism God names you and claims you as God's beloved child in Jesus Christ forever.

Today I can proclaim that in your baptism, God is well-pleased with you. You are beloved even when you mess up. Isaiah reminds us in our first lesson of a God who says, "I love you and you are mine. You are precious in my sight." Here God promises people who are in exile, who did break a covenant with God, and were punished for it, that they are forgiven and will return home. As we struggle with the displacement and pain of Covid, know that God still promises us a future with hope. As we feel like we are in a fire turned up 7 times hotter than normal, God is with us in the fire, preserving us so we don't get consumed like Shadrach, Meshack and Abednego in the book of Daniel.

Amen