

Claimed & Loved

(Baptism of the Lord Sunday)

January 10, 2021

UMC Geneva IL

A couple of days ago I happened to be on the phone with my brother John in Boston, and off the top of his head he asked if I still had a box of slides – pictures Dad had taken as a missionary in West Africa. I said, “Sure. I know right where they are.” Well, my brother wants me to turn these old Kodak slides into digital copies and share them with him and my other siblings.

A day or two later I found the box of slides and out of curiosity looked through them. Several of the slides show my father, nearly waist deep in a muddy pond of water, standing next to an African pastor. They were ready to officiate a baptism. I smiled as I remembered this familiar scene of outdoor baptisms in streams, ponds and rivers. It was always baptism by immersion and such a joyous event for the entire church!

As a Pastor, I must admit that baptisms are my favorite “ritual” in the life of the church. It is always such a joy to baptize infants and children in front of the entire congregation. But, of course, baptism is not just limited to infants and children, and one of my most memorable baptisms was of an 80 year old woman, Crete, in the very first church I served. In some ways, it was a total role reversal as her adult children and some grand-children stood with her as her “sponsors” and pledged to surround their Mom and Grandma with their love and support as she continued her Christian journey.

Well, this Sunday, January 10th is Baptism of the Lord Sunday, a time to remember, reflect and rejoice in our baptisms. Although we will not be worshipping in person, we will still “remember our baptisms and be thankful.” So what exactly are we thankful for today? Well, today I’m going to highlight three good reasons why we remember our baptisms and are thankful! And those three reasons are spelled out – by God – as God speaks to Jesus as he emerges from the baptismal waters of the Jordan River.

The first good reason to be thankful is that God reminds us, through our baptisms, that we belong to God! The very first thing God proclaims from the heavens at Jesus's baptism are these powerful words: "You are **my Son!**" I remember vividly how good it made me feel whenever my Dad publicly "claimed" me. Whether as a boy...a young man...even up to the final years of his life. In his final years, whenever Donna and I would travel to Akron, OH to visit Mom & Dad, inevitably Dad would introduce me to his neighbors and friends and proudly say, "This is **my** youngest son, Rich. He's a pastor serving a church near Chicago!" That always made me feel good.

Through our baptisms, God proclaims to the whole universe that you are God's child! In his blog for preachers, Pastor David Lose mentions Sherry Turkle – MIT Professor, internet scholar, and author of the book *Alone Together*. (1) She points out that in our culture today, social media offers a means for affirmation and belonging – whether through Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat and the like. These media platforms offer us venues in which to "like" other people and be "liked" by them in return. They help meet a fundamental human need – the need to "belong." Indeed, social media helps us feel that we're "linked in," that we're surrounded by a community of people like us, who like us...who value us.

Our baptisms remind us, powerfully, that we belong to the most important person in the universe – God the creator. Our baptisms remind us that we are claimed by that same God...that we are God's dear children.

Not only do we belong to God as dear children, God goes on to announce a second truth. God proclaims that we – you and I – are beloved by God. In our baptisms, God booms out loudly, "You are my child...**beloved!**" It just doesn't get any better than that, folks! I'm sure that many, if not most of you, can still remember the first time your significant other – or someone very close to you – said those three most beautiful words you'll ever hear: "I...love...you!" Well...that's exactly what God tells us in our baptisms. I love you Rich. I love you Donna. I love you Tom. I love you Mary. I love you Bill, and the like. Today...as we remember our baptisms, we are thankful that God reminds us that not only do we belong...we are beloved!

Finally...the third reason we remember our baptisms and are thankful today is we are **blessed**. Today we have the opportunity to hear once again that not only do we belong to God and are beloved by God. God blesses us by telling us that God is pleased with us! God assures us that as God's dear children we bring God pleasure!

You know, some people spend much of their lives – even into adulthood – trying to please their parents! Now, that's not necessarily a bad thing. Perhaps you've been there yourself, or know people like this...people who agonizingly try to please their parents their whole lives long, only to repeatedly hear the message – “you're not good enough,” “you've failed to live up to our expectations,” “surely you can do better,” and so on.

Well, as we remember our baptisms today, God proclaims loudly and clearly, just as God did at Jesus's baptism, that God is pleased with us...that we are pleasing to God. And so today, on Baptism of the Lord Sunday, once again we get to be reminded that we belong to God, we are beloved of God, and we are blessed by God. In other words, God claims us! God loves us! And God is proud of us! Now that is truly Good News! Remember you baptism, and be thankful!

Rev. Rich Darr

.....

(1) David Lose, *Dear Partner in Preaching*, “Baptism & Blessing,” January 5, 2015.