

Living within the Promises

Baptism of Jesus Yr B Mark 1:4-11 January 10, 2020

Rev. Peter Smith <http://www.stjamesuc.com>

I don't remember my baptism. Like many of you I was baptized as an infant so while I know I was baptized and have the certificate, I have no memory of the day itself or what happened.

However I do remember my parents teaching me how to pray, reading me Bible stories, and taking me to church. I remember the quiet certain faith of my grandmother and the inquisitive faith of my grandfather. I remember Sunday School teachers, ministers, and members of the church who taught me what it means to be a disciple through the lives they lived. And I remember the countless faithful people who demonstrated that the love and grace of God seen through what we say and do really does change the world.

This Sunday our gospel lesson is the baptism of Jesus. It's a story we read each year in January and this year we are hearing it from Mark's gospel. And no matter where in the Bible we read of Jesus coming to the river Jordan the events described are pretty much the same. Jesus goes to John, he is baptized, and the Spirit descends upon Jesus and a voice from heaven proclaims that Jesus is the beloved son who pleases God.

But unlike Matthew who gives us a bit of back and forth between John and Jesus at the river and makes us wonder why Jesus needs to be baptized, Luke who tells us about John's troubles with King Herod before the story of the baptism, and John who is more interested in telling us that Jesus is the Messiah than about the events of his baptism, Mark makes sure we hear John preaching that the messiah will baptize with the Holy Spirit and not water just before we hear the story of Jesus being baptized.

So when the Spirit descends like a dove we are thinking not just of what is happening to Jesus but rather about what Jesus comes to do in our lives. Our focus isn't on what was, although we hear the story, but rather on what will happen when Jesus touches our lives. Which is actually the point of Baptism. Because Baptism isn't about an action, although one happens, but about what takes place in our lives when we, or parents and godparents, make promises about our faith. Promises to share the stories of faith, promises to walk together as disciples, and promises to live as Christians and the church.

And I expect like me many of you have similar experiences in terms of the people who helped you in your faith. Family members who showed through their lives and teaching what it means to be a follower of Jesus and one of God's people and who shared in their lives the love and grace of God. Because the truth is whether we remember the actual event of our baptism or not what is important is how we live within those promises. How we choose to be the people God is calling us to be through our worship, through our service, and through our actions of faith.

Because while many of us had someone else take the promises on our behalf the truth is that we chose at some time, some point, to make those promises our own. To seek to better understand the words of Scripture, to have a deeper prayer life, to be part of a community of faith. And for some of us that decision was straightforward and we made that commitment and never looked back. And for others that decision led us on a winding path where we strayed, where we were uncertain, where we struggled.

And honestly for most of us there is probably a bit of both, times of certainty and times of uncertainty in our lives of faith. Which is fine. Because while baptism may be a commitment we make the truth is that baptism is not about what we do but rather about us choosing to allow God to work within our lives.

Baptism is a reminder that the Holy Spirit comes into our lives. Baptism is the voice of God telling us that we are loved, cherished, precious to God and treasured under heaven. Baptism is a witness to what God does and what God promises. And we know those promises. That we will never be alone that God will always be with us. That there is mercy and pardon for our sins, grace for new beginnings, love to sustain us, and the promise of blessings to change and transform our lives this day and in the days to come.

And so far I've talked about what others have done for us, what we do within baptism, and what God does. But there is one more part to talk about. Because remember all those things I mentioned at the start, the people who helped shape and guide me in my faith? Remember all those people you thought of who have been role models and examples for you?

Well there is an expectation as you live within the promise of baptism to be all of those things and more to others. To be a role model of faith, an example of Christianity, a mentor on God's behalf to your children and grandchildren, to your

family, to your neighbors and friends, and to the other people in this church.

And if you are sitting there wondering how you can possibly a role model, an example, a help to someone else in their faith let me tell you something you need to know. You already are a role model. Because when you live as a follower of Jesus, when you pray for someone, learn and grow in your faith, are generous, forgive and are gracious, then you are an example of what God is calling us to do and be. Others see God working in your life and discover the way of Jesus. Others witness to your sharing of love and grace and experience the movement of the Holy Spirit in the world.

And I know what you are thinking because I think it too- “But I’m not perfect, I don’t know all the answers, I get things wrong.” And all of that is true and none of that stops you from being a role model, an example, to others. Because I know in my life the people who helped me were not perfect by any means. They had their flaws, their shortcomings, and sometimes they got it wrong. But again that’s not the point. The point is that they believed in Jesus, they trusted in God, and they showed me the reality of faith.

And sometimes the greatest lessons of faith I learned came not when the people around me were perfect but when they were weak and vulnerable. I remember being a teenager at a church meeting when the chair broke down and tearfully admitted that she and her husband were getting a divorce. I was barely in High School and had no idea what to do or say. But the adults there showed me. They listened, they provided a place for her sorrow and pain to be shared, and they prayed together. They were there for her and I remember their witness of faith and I also remember hers for she showed me a side of faith I had not seen before.

That when we are in pain and hurting, when life is not what we hope or expect we need to reach for others to help us through the difficult day. For being a witness to Jesus, being a role model and example, a help to someone else doesn’t mean being perfect, having all the answers, and strong all that time. It means being honest and letting others help you when you need help.

So live within the promise of baptism, whether or not the water has been poured or you remember the words being said over you. Know that God is with you and discover with other people of faith what it means to be baptized with the Holy Spirit as we discover together the way that Jesus has opened for us.