

Lesson: Acts 19:1-7
Psalm 29
The Gospel: Mark 1:4-11

Baptism of the Lord
January 10, 2021

“Identity In Baptism”
Sermon Preached by Rev. Judith Rainforth
American Lutheran Church of Sun City

What is your identity in baptism? The problem often begins if we see it as a title instead of God’s plan for our lives. Let’s explore the baptism of Jesus and see how it relates to our baptism. All four of the Gospels talk about John and how Jesus asked to be baptized. Even though John had been proclaiming the Gospel and baptizing those who repented of their sins and wanted to make right their relationship with God, John is astonished that Jesus, the sinless Son of God, is asking him to baptize him. He feels he’s not worthy to do this. In Matthew 3:15, Jesus answered him: “Let it be so, for it is proper for us in this way to fulfill all righteousness.”

Jesus is baptized by John as a symbol of giving his will up to his Father. The beginning of his earthly ministry, at approximately 30 years of age, began his three year ministry all the way to the cross. Baptism was a crucial first step in his ministry. The Holy Spirit came upon him, and when he came out of the water, the heavens were torn apart and the Spirit descended like a dove upon him. A voice came from heaven: “You are my Son, the beloved; with you I am well pleased.” This was a sign that Jesus’ ministry was empowered by the Spirit and would usher in peace between humankind and God. Jesus didn’t need to repent or turn from sin; he was sinless. His baptism served as a sign to John and to future generations of believers that he was the Messiah, the beloved Son of God.

So how does this point to our identity in baptism? Baptism signifies so much in the life of Jesus and in our lives. First of all, it’s an *inauguration*. It began the process for Jesus’ ministry as the Son of God, and it begins the process for us, for you and for me. Whether we were baptized as infants or later on in our life, baptism is a sign of our humble beginnings as children of the heavenly Father. As infants, if that’s when we were baptized, our parents and godparents said the vows for us; they took that seriously. As they professed their faith and confessed their sins, they asked God to send his Holy Spirit to inspire them to raise their child in the Word, raise their child by bringing it to church, and raise their child in the way that God would have it. Then, as Lutherans, most of us were probably confirmed at the 8th grade age. That’s when we affirmed our baptismal vows and we celebrated once again that we are children of God.

I had a wonderful experience shortly after I came here to American Lutheran Church to serve as your Pastor of Spirituality and Care. I had a friend and I knew her mother Leona for a long time. I knew her mother had attended church. I didn’t know much about the details of her life, but she was such a peaceful woman. When I started visiting her in a senior living home here in Sun City, in one of our conversations I asked her where she was baptized. She looked at me and said “I never was baptized.” Our conversation continued from there, and tearfully I tell you that she decided she wanted to commit to her baptism. And so her two daughters and son-in-law gathered with us in the chapel as I baptized Leona. I will never forget that day! As I speak, she is on her deathbed, and for that I grieve. We all grieve to lose someone, but we do not grieve as though we have no hope, because we remember that Jesus went to the cross so that we could trust that we were secure for eternity.

The second thing I think our baptism is about is *obedience*. Just like Jesus, we are to live as God would have us live, and follow God's calling for our lives, to follow his commandments. To pray "God, what do you want me to do today? What is your will for my life? Give me the strength to follow you." Through obedience to the Word of God, we're called and equipped to lead God pleasing lives.

The third thing I want to talk about is *commitment*. Jesus' baptism took him all the way to the cross. We are called by God's plan for you and for me to commit – to commit to share the love of Jesus Christ in the world, to share that extreme love that Jesus showed for us by giving his life to be crucified, so that he could rise again for your sins and my sins. We don't have to hang on a cross like he did; the sacrifice will not be that great for us. But I pray that we're willing to make some sacrifices in our life to follow Jesus our Lord and Savior. Jesus' baptism started it all for you and for me. We are to share the Word of God, the Gospel; share our prayers, share our thanksgiving for baptism. Jesus died and rose again so that we could be saved by God's grace through faith in Jesus Christ alone, not through our good works (or we would never earn our way into heaven). No, it's by God's grace through faith in Jesus Christ alone! May God's grace through Jesus Christ alone be our identity in baptism.

Let us pray: Gracious and loving God, we know that Jesus' baptism account is a beautiful portrayal of the loving union of the Trinity – Father, Son and Holy Spirit. This moment in his life marked the beginning of his ministry in which he was partaking in the human experience fully, as the spotless Lamb of God sent to save the world. May we live our lives as your faithful servants in gratitude for your grace. As redeemed children, empower us with your Holy Spirit. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen!