

## **Message: Our Faith Journey in Baptism**

At the risk of harming your first impressions of me I want to confess something to you this morning. I have a tattoo.

Yes, many years ago, when I was much younger, I got a tattoo on my back left shoulder. Now, there is something I know about people who have tattoos. If you ask them for the story behind their tattoos, most people are very willing to share their story because it usually says something about their identity. So, I will share my story.

I have a younger cousin who always felt like a sister to me, and I am sure that she felt the same towards me. We still have that kind of love and relationship today. Well, this younger cousin of mine was getting a second tattoo and challenged me to get one as well. Unfortunately, I fell victim to that challenge, and there it is, a dolphin leaping in the water with the sunset in the background, permanently etched on my shoulder.

To be quite honest, until I see it when I am getting out of the shower, I tend to forget that I even have it.

I share that story because on this day, I think it is important to remember that we each have an important story to share about our identity. You see, there is a sense in which we each have our own tattoos, an identity given to us in baptism. As we remember and give thanks for our baptisms, we remember these words that were spoken over us, "You are marked with the cross of Christ in your lives – forever."

Think about that! Wow! What an amazing story that is to tell!

Today, our gospel reading gives us the story of Jesus' baptism. Now, quite honestly, John did not know what to do with the fact that Jesus came to him to be baptized. And, from the time Jesus first presented himself for baptism by John until today, Christians have puzzled over why Jesus had to be baptized. I am sure there are many here today who have wondered themselves.

At the time of our reading today, the act of baptism was understood to be an act of repentance and the cleansing of one's sins. So, John does not understand why Jesus, whose sandals John is "not worthy to carry" should seek to be baptized. Instead, John declares to Jesus, "I need to be baptized by you." Why should the Son of God need to be baptized?

This act of humility is an act of obedience to God and an act of pure love as Jesus begins his ministry, an action through which he enters solidarity with all of humankind and all of creation.

Jesus did not need to be forgiven. However, for us, he goes down to the river of repentance with all the other sinners to be baptized.

He enters the depths of human life and is baptized. Jesus' baptism, his first adult act as recorded in Matthew's gospel, gives us a clear indication of how he will act for his entire life.

The Son of God, out of love for human beings and all of creation, comes down to us and with us, on our level, identifying with our needs and our brokenness. His baptism, then, foreshadows how his life will also end, on the cross. In his death, Jesus experiences the worst we could ever experience as mortal humans.

But, because Jesus united with us in baptism, we are united with him in both his death and resurrection. Through his humility, Jesus comes down to us in the depths of our humanity and shows us that we are beloved! He shows us that God loves us!

There definitely is a story to tell about baptism. Jesus did not come to change the mind of God about humanity. Jesus came to change the mind of humanity about God. Just think about that. "Jesus did not come to change the mind of God about humanity. Jesus came to change the mind of humanity about God."

Jesus came to proclaim that we are God's beloved! You see, it is all about what God in Christ has done for us! Remember, when Jesus had been baptized and the Spirit of God descended upon him like a dove, a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased."

That word "beloved" is such a beautiful word. To be beloved is to be adored. To be beloved is to be cherished and to be treasured. This is also the promise given to us in our baptism. You see, baptism is first and foremost an act of God. It is about God claiming us as God's very own, as God's beloved children. It is all about God declaring to us that we belong to God. And, because we belong to God, baptism is about God telling us that God is well pleased with us!

Now, I don't know about you, but I think that is a story each one of us should be proclaiming from the mountaintops. It is a story about our identity! We no longer need to work so hard to justify ourselves or our existence because we have been given this priceless identity.

We are beloved by God and God is pleased with us! You are beloved by God and God is pleased with you! And it is all because of what God has done!

Yet, that is not always the story we tell ourselves. Quite honestly, many of us have another story that runs in our head. Sometimes we call this storyteller the inner critic,

that one who reminds us just what a failure we are or how people may only be pretending to like us.

That inner critic sometimes tells us we are not attractive enough or talented enough or clever enough or intelligent enough to be beloved, let alone have someone be pleased with us.

I know this because I have experienced that inner critic far too often. And so, in our brokenness, we desperately do all kinds of things as we attempt to justify our existence, just so we can measure up!

I don't know about you, but do you remember the last baptism you were part of? Do you remember how the Spirit of God fell upon us as we gave witness to that baptism? No, we didn't see a dove pour down the Spirit of God when it happened, but we truly felt it. The pure miracle of a new life being baptized into the life of God is so amazing.

That's why we need to tell this baptism story repeatedly – to counter the story of the inner critic, and to counter the story the world often tells.

You know how that story that the world often tells goes, the one that says to be truly beloved you must possess something: money, house, good looks, power.

But we tell our baptismal story over and over to counter that story, or stories, that we don't measure up or that we don't belong.

We need to remember our true identity, remember how deeply we are loved, and we need to hear that story told to us repeatedly and celebrate this precious gift!

But, my friends, there is yet more to celebrate about this gift of baptism! The story of baptism is not only that we belong to God and are beloved by God; it is a story that we belong to each other, that we are a part of a community, that we are part of a larger story of God's presence in the world.

We, who sometimes feel rejected because we just don't measure up, are chosen to be a part of something big and beautiful. Just as God had chosen us in our baptism, God has also made us members of God's family! We are part of God's kingdom.

So, it is important that we come together in worship, not only because we need to hear repeatedly that God loves us and has claimed us as beloved children, cherished and treasured. We also need to come together in worship because our wells sometimes have run dry, and we need to feel those refreshing waters of baptism trickling over us again.

Quite honestly, sometimes life is just so hard we have no words to pray or no songs to sing; we are just that empty.

Sometimes it's the community of the baptized that sings those hymns we can't always sing, and sometimes it's the community that prays the prayers we can't always pray, and sometimes it's the community that speaks the words of faith that we might have trouble speaking ourselves or even believing ourselves.

And, we just deeply need to let those words and songs and prayers wash over us, reminding us of God's love, reminding us that in the waters of baptism, God has called us and claimed us as God's own, beloved, delightful and cherished children!

Jesus entered that baptismal river to become one with humanity and to tell us we are beloved. That is the story of baptism and the story of our baptisms. That is the mark we carry, and it is our identity. That's a story worth living in. And that is a story worth telling, repeatedly! Thanks be to God. Amen