

Sermon 24.01.21

Kate Heinzl, pastor UMC

Baptism II

Mark 1: 1-11

The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

As it is written in the prophet Isaiah,
'See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you,
who will prepare your way;
the voice of one crying out in the wilderness:

"Prepare the way of the Lord,
make his paths straight" ',

John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. And people from the whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem were going out to him, and were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. Now John was clothed with camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. He proclaimed, 'The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the thong of his sandals. I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.'

In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. And a voice came from heaven, 'You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.'

(from study bible: Wisdom, 'the fashioner of all things' is a distinct divine reality - what follows are some of wisdom's characteristics)

Wisdom of Solomon 7: 22-30

There is in her a spirit that is intelligent, holy,
unique, manifold, subtle,
mobile, clear, unpolluted,
distinct, invulnerable, loving the good, keen,
irresistible, beneficent, humane,
steadfast, sure, free from anxiety,
all-powerful, overseeing all,

and penetrating through all spirits
that are intelligent, pure, and altogether subtle.
For wisdom is more mobile than any motion;
because of her pureness she pervades and penetrates all things.
For she is a breath of the power of God,
and a pure emanation of the glory of the Almighty;
therefore nothing defiled gains entrance into her.
For she is a reflection of eternal light,
a spotless mirror of the working of God,
and an image of his goodness.
Although she is but one, she can do all things,
and while remaining in herself, she renews all things;
in every generation she passes into holy souls
and makes them friends of God, and prophets;
for God loves nothing so much as the person who lives with wisdom.
She is more beautiful than the sun,
and excels every constellation of the stars.
Compared with the light she is found to be superior,
for it is succeeded by the night,
but against wisdom evil does not prevail.

Sermon:

Today we're building on the historical introduction to baptism Ken preached last week, hearing more stories of what baptism was for a few of you, and how it impacts us today.

Ken taught us about the miqveh (Mik-vuh) - the place where Jews go for purification. How, after contact with a corpse, menstruation, sex, childbirth - one immerses oneself in the waters of cleansing. The Miqveh.

That ritual is about becoming clean. None of those acts are necessarily sinful.

In our scripture today, John is re-purposing this ritual - taking something familiar and making it into something new.

In this new baptism, John calls the people to repent and rededicate themselves toward doing what God wants.¹

Jewish life, then and now, is lived out in community. On the Day of Atonement, Yom Kippur, they pray 'forgive *us*...' just as in the Lord's prayer we pray: 'forgive *us*'.

Atoning in the plural means that one person's sins impacts us all.

Even if we're not personally responsible for committing a particular sin, we still atone as a community.

John tells them that RIGHT NOW is the time to repent, to make new - to fix broken relationships; to restore community.

And then our scripture reads, "In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan."

One more person shows up to be baptized. No fanfare. Just an ordinary day.

By accepting John's baptism, Jesus accepts his role as part of the human community.²

Following Jesus' example, when we choose baptism, we accept our place in the community of faith -as an individual, AND as a member of the body. It's both personal and communal.

Personal and communal - holding these both is central to our Mennonite understanding of what it means to be a follower of Jesus.

Last week in children's time we had a Q and A - one question was about the importance of baptism for Mennonites. That band of Jesus followers, 500 years ago, felt convicted that baptism was to be a choice, not of one's parents, but by believers themselves. And so it is for us today. We're going to hear a few more stories of those who chose baptism - to commit their lives to the ways of Jesus.

¹ Levine, Amy-Jill. 2023. *The Gospel of Mark: A beginners guide to the good news*. Abingdon Press. Nashville.

² IBID.

CHILDREN'S TIME - with Sarah Jeh and Nathan Derstine

tell us about your baptism and how it shapes you today.

at end: kids can stay up front or go back to seats

For some of us, our baptism was a pivotal experience in our faith journey, for others, the event may have been less impactful, but instead was a marker of the beginning. The beginning of a life of seeking Christ.

Stories shape us; they help us understand ourselves and one another. They create distinctive communities.

And so we continue with stories -

We're going to hear from the Keener's some of our congregation's oldest members. Begin with Carl. (SHOW VIDEO)

Invite Laura upfront - *tell us about your baptism and how it shapes you today.*

And one last baptismal story - let's hear from Gladdie Keener. (SHOW VIDEO)

KATE TO END:

Our scripture today is such a powerful story - in the gospel writers spare language we hear:

“And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. And a voice came from heaven, ‘You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.’”

You are my son, the beloved; with you I am well pleased.

Jesus hasn't done anything special that we know of. An ordinary person on an ordinary day, hears words of blessing as he chooses life with God.

You are my beloved.

Can we hear that, for ourselves?

Take a minute to hear that for yourself - God naming you; you as a beloved.

And can we hear it for one another?

Each one, beloved in the kingdom of God.

All of us, beloved children of the Creator.