

JANUARY 19TH, 2019
SPRINGFIELD PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
BAPTISM OF OUR LORD
10:30AM

Called by Name

I. Water

As I think about the baptism of Jesus, I naturally think of water, and I think about how important water has been in my own life. As many of you know, I grew up on the beach and from a very early age, I learned to respect the ocean. Water was a part of my daily life, not only drinking water or taking a shower, but the smell of the sea was constantly in the air.

The ocean and I have a rich history, from swimming in it, to trying to learn how to bodysurf, to staring at it endlessly perched on a lifeguard stand. The ocean was and has always been a great comfort to me. As I looked out to the horizon, the water went on and on and on – it never ended. When storms would come in, you saw the fierceness of the weather in waves and the tides. When the water would flood the area, I often remembered that respect of the sea, that the sea was here before all of our houses, and while floods are tough, I knew that water was a power beyond me.

I learned about God from an early age in the church, but my first ~~at~~ knowledge of God's presence was actually at the sea. In respect, in awe, in majesty – the tides roll, the waves crest, and the

water goes on – ever flowing, ever present, ever lasting. As a kid, God was a lot like the ocean – again – ever flowing, ever present, and ever lasting. If there were no church and no pews, I think my greatest lessons about God and who God is would be from the waters.

II. And a Good Theological Reason

And, so it seems, my kid theology had a proper place in Biblical history, as we hear about Jesus' baptism this morning. Jesus acknowledges water as important, as sacred, as a particular means of how God is at work in the world. If we go to the very beginning pages of the Bible, we see how important water is as well. Theologian Steven Driver writes this, "Genesis records that, in the beginning, the Spirit hovered over the waters. In Matthew, the spirit of God once again hovers over the waters, and once again the Word of God speaks. Genesis describes God bringing order to chaos through his Word. Matthew describes God taming the chaos of our sins through his Word. Genesis describes the abundant possibilities of God's creative work. Matthew describes the renewal of those possibilities through God's entering into creation in order to redeem it."

Drivers point, well made and in abbreviated form, is that water has been from the beginning of time, a great source in which

God comes into this world in new and vibrant ways. Water becomes a tangible expression of God alive and at work in the world.

III. Jesus and Baptism

One of the good questions that arises from this passage, and it still hits me every time I read it is – why would Jesus ever need to be baptized? Jesus is human and divine, but sinless to the end, so he doesn't need this means of purification. Yet, what I believe is happening is that Jesus is participating in baptism as an example to all of what it looks like to be a faithful follower. Jesus didn't need the baptism, Jesus set the example. He did it for us, not for him. And he did it as a witness, where God was able to speak – “This is my son, my beloved, with whom I am well pleased.” In baptism, Jesus sets the precedent for what it means to be a faithful believer.

Another question I've heard is about the baptism procedure, if you will. In this case, Jesus is being plunged under the waters. The metaphor goes that, as he is in the waters, his old life dies there, and when he takes his first breath as he rises from the water, that is the new life, the life called and claimed by God. So, are Presbyterians less holy because we sprinkle water?

Well, no. A fun fact is that some Presbyterians do go to the river and get baptized, it depends where you are and the tradition

of the church. If anyone wanted to go down to the Liberty Reservoir and be baptized, they would be totally theologically and biblical good to go. The practical reason we often find ourselves, at SPC, to sprinkle the water, is that we know that whether or not you plunged under water, the symbolism and the meaning stays the same. One method or the other isn't better, it's just different, and a lot of it revolves around what is easiest and most comfortable for the baptizee and the congregation. So whether you've had a full body immersion or water in the form of a cross on your forehead, know that both are valid, both are important, and both restore and renew all of us and call us from our old life to a new life in Christ.

III. The Call and The Challenge

The call and the challenge is a multi-faceted one this week, because in this short passage, we are called to so much. First and foremost, we thank God for Jesus' example, for teaching us that through baptism, we are claimed as God's very own, God's beloved people. We take this opportunity to remember our own baptism, whether that while we were an infant and our parents did it on our behalf or if ~~that~~ happened during our adulthood. We remember and ^{if our own choosing} we, with joy, acknowledge that we are loved and called by name.

And, no worries, if you aren't baptized. You aren't put into ^{time out} this Sunday. Baptism is a beautiful and individual choice, it

is a choice to make when you feel a nudge by the Spirit to be renewed by the renewal of the waters. We can talk, but there's no rush, for I believe, baptized or not, God claims you already. In baptism, you are receiving the gift and claiming God for yourself.

Another challenge is to remember that baptism is not the culmination of faith - it is the beginning. Baptism marked the beginning of Jesus' ministry, it gave him the depths of the waters, a new birth, and renewed him to help him take the first step out into those sometimes tenuous ways of ministry.

When we are baptized, we begin our ministry. Yes, even the little ones. When we baptize small children, we show them what ministry looks like and as they grow, even in the earliest of years, we see powerful and beautiful words come from our children and youth. This is also a fruitful reminder...the good and bad news perhaps - our children are watching you. They are watching me. They are witnessing what we do, why we do it, and how it glorifies God. They will mirror our actions, our intentions, and so as adult baptized believers, we've got some responsibility on our shoulders.

You see, whether our baptism was 30, 50, 70 years ago - it doesn't matter. That baptism call is as important as it was in the very moment that water was put upon your head. The call does not change, if anything, it gets stronger. You learn more, you live more and experience more, and your ministry continues. Today, as we think deeply about the waters, as we remember Christ's baptism,

we remember our own, and our call to fiercely go out into this world and to be the people God calls us to be. Led by the Spirit, renewed by the waters, and set again and again on the path of fruitful and faithful ministry. Amen.