

Dallas Dodd Presbyterian Church

01.14.19

“Baptism as an act of Love”

Our Old Testament scripture today is Isaiah 43:1-7, Listen now for the word of the Lord:

1 But now thus says the LORD, God who created you, O Jacob,

God who formed you, O Israel:

Do not fear, for I have redeemed you;

I have called you by name, you are mine.

2 When you pass through the waters, I will be with you;

and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you;

when you walk through fire you shall not be burned,

and the flame shall not consume you.

3 For I am the LORD your God,

the Holy One of Israel, your Savior.

I give Egypt as your ransom,

Ethiopia and Seba in exchange for you.

4 Because you are precious in my sight,

and honored, and I love you,

I give people in return for you,

nations in exchange for your life.

5 Do not fear, for I am with you;

I will bring your offspring from the east,

and from the west I will gather you;

6 I will say to the north, "Give them up,"

and to the south, "Do not withhold;

bring my sons from far away

and my daughters from the end of the earth —

7 everyone who is called by my name,

whom I created for my glory,  
whom I formed and made."

Our New Testament scripture is Luke 3:15-17, 21-22:

15 As the people were filled with expectation, and all were questioning in their hearts concerning John, whether he might be the Messiah, 16 John answered all of them by saying, "I baptize you with water; but one who is more powerful than I is coming; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. 17 His winnowing fork is in his hand, to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his granary; but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire."

21 Now when all the people were baptized, and when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, the heaven was opened, 22 and the Holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you, I am well pleased."

((this is the Word of the Lord)) ((Thanks be to God))

Today is the baptism of the Lord Sunday. We celebrate the baptism of Jesus while remembering our own and acknowledging the fact that the God who called Jesus to be baptized is the same God that has called us to be baptized and live with one another in community. A lot of us may not technically remember being baptized. I don't because my parents chose for me to be baptized when I was about 6 months old. However, I have seen a lot of baptisms over the years, in many churches and in 2 different countries. But I also have a friend at school who takes the baptismal vows very seriously, even if I didn't witness her children's baptisms.

My friend, Karen, has 4 kids. Their whole family lives at the Seminary, and Karen and her spouse are some of my closest friends at school. Once, we were sitting at our

weekly potluck dinner and the second youngest came up to Karen and her spouse and asked for help with getting water. With how we were sitting, it was going to be easier for me to get up and help him with water instead of his parents.

So, I got up, told him to follow me, got him some water, and went to sit down. His parent's thanked me and I said "no problem... it takes a village right?" Karen looked up and said, "of course. And of course, he's been baptized." I asked Karen what she meant and she said something that has stuck with me ever since.

Karen said, "well, he's been baptized in the Presbyterian church, so have you. And you have promised every time you saw a baptism to love and guide the child you're witnessing. But every baptism, you're also reaffirming your promise to love and guide every other person who has been baptized or will be baptized."

I had not thought of baptism so intensely before then. I had not taken it as seriously as I should have been. I realized at that moment, that baptism wasn't simply a ritual that our church participates in. Karen took it so seriously that we had agreed, by being members of this church, that if her kids were unsafe, or if they needed help, or if they ever had questions, that we would be there for them. Since that moment, I have seen those kids in a different way, and each time I witness a baptism, I recognize that not only is our Church agreeing to raise them in faith, but I specifically am agreeing. It is not some broad, empty promise. It is personal. And it started with a call from God to baptize God's people. Even Jesus, God's heir, was called to be baptized.

I absolutely love John's reaction to people asking if he is the Messiah. He doesn't just say no, and explain that Jesus is the Messiah that will come. Instead, he says, "I baptize you with water; but one who is more powerful than I is coming; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire."

This statement reminds me specifically that the water we pour over our heads or get dunked into, or is smeared across our foreheads, it is not simply water. It has been blessed. It is truly the Spirit and fire. Just as John explained. Because there is more connecting us than just this water in a basin. The true connection is the fire of the Holy Spirit.

Why come to be baptized though? Why not just be present in Church and raise our children in the faith? I believe our Old Testament scripture answers that exact question. Our passage this morning says:

“When you pass through the waters, I will be with you;  
and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you;  
when you walk through fire you shall not be burned,  
and the flame shall not consume you.”

This speaks directly to our understanding of baptism. God is with us when we pass through the waters. The rivers will not overwhelm us. Perhaps this means we are not overwhelmed by the rivers of life. The harder times, the moments that we feel like we are drowning. Those times will not overwhelm us. This doesn't mean that we won't feel overwhelmed or won't still feel like the hard times will never end, but it is a promise that God will bring us through to the other side. We will not be burned by the fire when we walk through it. The flame won't consume us because the flame is the thing that connects us all. The Spirit is the flame that never burns us, and yet we pass through it all the time.

God specifically says that God loves us so much that not only are we called to be in community with one another, but God is in that community as well. It is so important to be in community with God and each other that our scripture literally says we are being gathered from all directions:

Do not fear, for I am with you;  
I will bring your offspring from the east,  
and from the west I will gather you;  
I will say to the north, "Give them up,"  
and to the south, "Do not withhold;  
bring my sons from far away  
and my daughters from the end of the earth —

God is going to the ends of the earth to gather us. That shows an insane amount of love. But we are being gathered so that we are in community and loving each other. This community is seen through the sacrament of baptism.

After baptizing Jesus, God is heard saying, “you are my Son, the Beloved; with you, I am well pleased.” Jesus has been baptized into the same community we get to be a part of. The Spirit has connected us all through time and space to create that community that we are all a part of because we have been baptized and connected to the body of Christ. Even Christ himself has been joined to this body through baptism.

I think about Karen’s kids. One is 12, one is 10, one is 6 and the last is 5. As I’ve said, they have all been baptized into the Church. But I think about the days that they will question who they are. I wonder if they will go through the times that they question their relationships with God. Then I remember every time I questioned the same things. I remember that I also question who I am. I especially ask who I am in the relationship with the God of our Universe. So today I am asking- are you wondering who you are. We have entered a new year, we have found ourselves in a time in our country that seems more divided every day, we have been asked to stand on one side or another of every issue in our current events. Who are you?

These scripture passages tell us who we are.

“Because you are precious in my sight,  
and honored, and I love you,  
I give people in return for you,  
nations in exchange for your life.”

This is the central verse of our Old Testament passage. We are God’s honored and loved children. You are God’s honored and loved child. God is willing to not only love and honor you, but God is willing to give people in return for you and nations in exchange for our lives. In our New Testament passage, God is distinctly pleased as Jesus gets baptized. If we are also the children of God, we can connect that God is equally pleased with us in choosing to be a part of the Body of Christ through baptism.

Our next question could be “whose are we?” This question comes immediately after God has called us loved and honored. God is pleased with us. In answering the question: whose are we? We must fully acknowledge that we are God’s children. We have been called together into this body together, and love and care for one another. We are looking, desperately, for someone to lead us. We are part of the crowd asking John if he is the Messiah if he is the one who has come to save us all. But what we know, and what we must claim through our baptisms, is that the One true Lord has saved us, redeemed us and loved us through it all. We claim this through being baptized because we acknowledge we are children of God, we accept that love that has been freely given to us and we promise to love and protect all other children of God.

We have been called loved and honored by God. God has called us over and over to love and honor other people and spend time in community with the Body of Christ. This is a call we can’t ignore because it is one we have already been accepted into through baptism. And the most perfect being has led us in this call. Jesus went before us by being baptized by John. Jesus leads us through the Spirit to be a part of the Body of Christ, and love each other and spend time in this community. Let us go, and do as we have been called to.

Please pray with me,

God-

You have called us from the North and South, gathered us from the East and from the West. You have protected us from the fires because you love us. You have called us to be in community with one another through baptism and follow your son who was baptized before us. We fall short of this call every day, but we ask you to lead us, by your Spirit into life and community that pleases you.

In your most holy name,

Amen



