

Isaiah 43:1-7

Luke 3:15-17,21-22

Acts 8:14-17

“May the Lord give strength to people,  
and bless us with peace.” AMEN!

The Baptism of Our Lord Sunday is one of  
those annual events where preachers feel  
the need to try to explain baptism or  
share theories on why Jesus  
was baptized.

It can make for a rather dull  
and un-Spirited sermons,  
if you ask me.

Which is ironic since the Holy Spirit  
ought to be celebrated on  
a baptism event.

This can also be a day when we hear  
the kind of sermon, unfortunately,  
where pastor's try to explain how  
their denomination does it right  
and others miss the mark.

While these messages feel good for our ego  
they aren't particularly unifying or even Biblical. :-)

So, today I'd like to try and break that cycle.

I haven't always been on this side  
of open mindedness, but I think we can do it,  
don't you? :-)

If you were hoping for a sermon to  
defend infant baptism or one  
that supports believer's baptism, or  
one to explain why Jesus was baptized,

then you'll be disappointed but if you are looking  
for a sermon to help understand how  
God touches you, then you've come to  
the right place. (Pause)

Most of you know that our family's move  
to Tallahassee (3 1/2 years ago) was like  
a "coming home" event for me.

Colleen and I met at FSU.

It was at a party on a Friday night in  
a townhome on Tharpe St.

Right where Ocala Rd runs into Tharpe Street.

Neither one of us were born in Tallahassee  
but a relationship was born here.

So it was like coming home for us. Awe! :-)

However, that is not the point  
I want to make.

The point I'm thinking about occurred  
a few months before that love connection.

It was when I went to church with  
my grandmother who lived in Killearn.

She belonged to Killearn United Methodist  
and frequently I would join her for  
Sunday worship there.

This one particular Sunday  
happened when I was 19.

Grandma and I loved a soloist who would  
sing from time to time.

He had a lovely voice and would  
often sing after the sermon.

I can't remember the sermon;  
I can't remember the song he sang but  
I do recall feeling overwhelmed with emotion.

Tears just came as I sat there.

Since I was a teenager, I felt a little embarrassed  
so I quickly recovered and finished  
the worship as normal, but no one made  
a big deal about it.

After church, Grandma took me to lunch and  
I mentioned that I wasn't sure what  
happened at the church today?

She told me quite frankly and  
without missing a beat.

She said, "God touched you, today."

At the time it didn't feel that my life changed  
or my behavior was altered that much, but

now that is the only way  
for me to describe what happened.

God touched just like God has touched  
each and everyone of you, and sometimes it  
is enough to bring tears.

God touched you and gave  
to you the Holy Spirit. (Pause)

One of the funny things we pastors do is  
look at the ways each gospel reports or

witnesses to a similar occurrence.

There are some unique things about  
Luke's witness to the baptism of Jesus.

Luke connects the coming of the  
Holy Spirit to Jesus with prayer.

Verse 21-22, "Now when all the people  
were baptized and when Jesus had also  
been baptized AND WAS PRAYING,

the heaven was opened, and  
the Holy Spirit descended upon him in  
bodily form."

No other gospel makes note  
that Jesus was praying at his baptism.

For Luke, prayer is a critical component  
for the coming of the Holy Spirit.

Baptism, with prayer, launched Jesus' ministry  
that day as God touched Jesus.

Now some get nervous or worried that if God  
touched Jesus at his baptism and during  
his prayer then God must not have  
touched Jesus sooner,

but I don't think there's a need to  
make a big deal about this realization.

We, in fact, need multiple reminders.

Maybe Jesus did, too?

What we do know is that Jesus will use  
his behavior from this point on for us  
to have a model on how we are to live  
and how we are to love.

What is also revealed here is the truth of how  
the baptism that occurred was  
a communal experience.

“All the people were baptized and  
Jesus also had been baptized,” meant

that it was an experience where people  
came together to be a part of  
something bigger than themselves.

We yearn to be a part of something  
bigger than ourselves.

We all do!

It is why we are here and why you are  
all connected with us,  
and we with you,  
even afar.

Jesus' baptism does not narrow our  
understanding of the rite of passage, but  
instead helps us expand our  
understanding of baptism.

In many ways undefinable but still  
a communal moment when God touches  
humanity and unites us into something  
greater than our singular selves. (Pause)

Another unique aspect of Luke's witness here is  
that in the text, after the baptisms, we are  
told the age of Jesus (about 30 years old)

and then the author lists the genealogy  
of Jesus, in reverse order beginning  
from Jesus and going backwards to "son of God."

Before it gets to God, though, there is  
"Son of" this person and "son of" that person,  
all male names unfortunately, but we note  
that women were probably  
pretty important in the process. :-)

Mary, Ruth, Leah, Sarai to name only a few.

Not all of them Israelite, either.

Luke uses the interlude between the baptisms  
and Jesus' temptation story to point  
to the way Jesus is connected  
all the way to God as well as telling

the truth about how Jesus represents all people.

A gift for all of the human family.

Jesus and baptism link all  
people and all communities.

The demarcation lines that humans create  
no longer exist when it comes to God's  
family on earth now.

Just think how the world would change for the better  
if we were able to see how the same Spirit  
that possesses you and me

also possesses the people we struggle  
with the most to be around?

Yet, this is what being baptized by  
the Holy Spirit means.

It allows us to let go and let God do  
what God does best.

That is, touch hearts and lives. (Pause)

How has God touched you?

John said, “I baptize you with water;  
but one more powerful than I is coming.

That One will baptize you with  
the Holy Spirit and with fire.

How has God touched you?

His winnowing fork is in his hand, to clear  
the threshing floor and to gather  
the wheat in the granary;

but the chaff will be burned with unquenchable fire.”

That’s about as fire and brimstone that I’ll get! :-)

The harvest imagery is notable.

Wheat was the main product that sustained  
lives in Jesus’ time and it fed  
the wealthy and the poor, alike.

Wheat was an image that spoke to an  
economically diverse audience.

The chaff is the husk of the grain.

It remained after the harvest but it  
could not be consumed.

Therefore, it could not sustain life;  
You didn't eat it.

While preachers sometimes use this text  
to issue moral directives trying to call people  
to action or persuade others to do things,

we go away from such sermons untouched by God.

Yet, what touches us is  
the gracious gospel promise.

That Jesus will be resolute from here on.

From this time of community  
experience at baptism and with  
inclusiveness without boundary.

Jesus is now determined and unwavering,  
sometimes even destructively in service

to the things that preserve and sustain life.

So, if you are wading in the water  
that sustains and preserves life then  
you will be touched by God.

If you pursue equality for people and  
sustainability of resources then God has  
an even greater chance to touch other  
people because they are wading in  
the water, too.

And... God's gonna trouble the water, Holy Spirit  
come stir it up, and lead us to some good trouble.

AMEN!