

SERMON MARK 1 REMEMBER YOUR BAPTISM

January 12, 2025

Last Sunday in the Wesley Covenant Service, we renewed our commitment to walk with the Lord during 2025. One of the most visible signs of our commitment to the Lord is our baptism. In our baptism we publicly acknowledge that we have given our lives to Jesus Christ. Traditionally the second Sunday in a new year is set aside in the church to celebrate and remember the baptism of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. This was such a significant event in the life of Jesus that it is recorded in all four Gospels with each one written from a different perspective. Each writer gives us different insights and this adds to our understanding of this sacrament of the church. This morning let's look at the first recorded account of Jesus' baptism which is found in the first chapter of the Gospel of Mark, verses 9 through 11.

Read Mark 1:9-11

Now whenever you get Methodists and Baptists together, the subject of the proper method of baptism is sure to come up. The Baptist Church believes that you must be immersed, while the Methodist Church accepts three approaches for baptism: sprinkling, pouring and immersion. Someone once asked me what's the difference between Methodists and Baptists, and I said that we use less water.

The young son of a Baptist preacher watched his father baptize someone by immersion. He was so impressed by the ceremony that he decided to baptize his three cats in the bathtub. The youngest kitten bore it well, and so did the younger cat, but the old family tom cat rebelled. The old cat struggled with the boy, clawing and scratching him before finally getting away. With considerable effort the boy caught the old tom cat again and proceeded with the ceremony. But things got worse with the old cat clawing, spitting and scratching the boy's face. Finally, after just getting a little water on the cat's head, the boy dropped the old cat on the floor in disgust and said: "Fine, be a Methodist then, and go to hell!"

Then there was a man who had been raised in the Methodist Church, but later became active in a Baptist church when he moved to a new town. One day he was helping clean up after a potluck. He emptied the large, electric coffee pot and handed it to the lady washing dishes. "Can this be washed like everything else?" she asked. "No," he replied, "This is a Methodist coffee pot. It says right here, 'Do Not Immerse.'"

One more story: before performing a baptism, the priest approached the young father and said: "Baptism is a serious step. Are you prepared?" "I think so," the man replied, "My wife has made appetizers and we have a caterer coming to provide plenty of cookies and cakes for the guests." "I don't mean that," the priest responded. "I mean are you prepared spiritually?" "Oh, sure," came the reply, "I've got a keg of beer and a case of whisky."

Now I have always said that it doesn't matter how you are baptized – sprinkled, poured, immersed, or doused with a fire hose. As a matter of fact, the Methodist Church accepts the baptisms of all Christian denominations, and considers baptism as something that should unite rather than divide us as Christians. What really matters is what's in your heart, that you truly believe and accept Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior. Just as walking through a car wash does not make you a car, so baptism and the method used does not make you a Christian. Hopefully, Jesus Christ comes into your heart long before the water goes over your head. Neither the water nor the method of baptism used saves you; it's just the public acknowledgement that you have accepted Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior and that you are a Christian.

If you have studied the Gospel of Mark, you realize that of all the four gospel writers Mark does not waste words, but gets right to the point without any real explanation or background material. In our story this morning, Jesus comes and is baptized. That's it. No word as to why Mark believes His baptism is necessary; no explanation as to why a person without sin needs to repent; and no insights into the amount of water or method used to baptize Jesus.

So, this morning let's focus on the question: "Why would Jesus, the Son of God, need to be baptized?" Because of all people, Jesus is the One who should be exempt. Baptism is for those who repent of their sins and pledge to live better lives. Hebrews 4:15 states that Jesus was without sin. So why didn't He just stand on the banks of the Jordan River and watch all the sinners being baptized.

Well, let's discuss four possible reasons. First, it was a moment of decision for Jesus; He made a deliberate decision to allow John to baptize Him. For thirty years, Jesus had stayed in Nazareth supporting His mother and family, faithfully working in the family carpenter's shop. For a long time, He must have been waiting for a sign as to begin His ministry, and the emergence of John the Baptist, the voice in the wilderness, was that sign. So, one day, Jesus folded up the carpenter's apron, put it on the bench, left the shop, and went into the house and told His mother and family goodbye. This was a turning point in His life as He began His public ministry and His eventual journey to the cross and resurrection.

Second, it was a moment of identification. It is true that Jesus did not need to repent from any sin, but as described in the Gospel of Luke, John the Baptist had started a movement of the people back to God, and Jesus was determined to be identified with this God-ward movement. In his gospel account, Luke tells us that "when all the people were being baptized, Jesus was baptized too." By this act of baptism, Jesus completely identified Himself with ordinary people like you and me, with our sins and failures, thus becoming our substitute and our Savior.

Third, it was a moment of approval. Think about it, most people don't just pick-up and leave home and their livelihood behind and set out on an unknown path without some confirmation of their decision. You want to be sure that you are on the right path. Jesus had decided on His course of action and now He was looking for a seal of approval from God. At His baptism, Jesus submitted His decision to God and that decision was definitely affirmed.

Speaking directly to Jesus, God says: "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased." Now this saying has its roots in the Old Testament. "You are my beloved Son" comes from Psalm 2:7, and was always recognized as a description of the Messiah. "In whom I am well pleased" is a description of the suffering servant in Isaiah 42:1. Therefore, at His baptism Jesus received confirmation that first, He was the Messiah; and second, that this involved not just power and glory, but also suffering and a cross. Thus, at His baptism, Jesus came seeking God's approval, but also received His destiny with the cross.

Finally, it was the moment of equipping. At His baptism, the Holy Spirit descended on Jesus in the form of a dove and remained with Him throughout His ministry.

In the Protestant tradition, a sacrament is a means of grace in which Jesus participated and instructed us to also participate. Thus in the Methodist Church, we recognize and celebrate two sacraments – baptism and the Lord's Supper or Holy Communion. Baptism is our way of announcing to all the world that we are followers of Jesus Christ. It is a public declaration of our private decision. When we are baptized and announce that we have accepted Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior, we begin our journey down a unique and narrow road.

Over the years, the church has come to associate baptism with the commission to serve. Baptism both commissions and equips us for service to the Lord. By baptism, the whole church is called to ministry. Here's a fact that many of us tend to overlook – ministry is not restricted to the clergy, but is the responsibility and calling of all who believe in Jesus Christ. Jesus set the example for us all when He said in Matthew 20:28 that He came not to be served but to serve. Thus we are to become His hands and feet in service to the world. Just as Jesus was equipped at His baptism by the Holy Spirit, so are we equipped for our ministry. In a sense we get a full tank of gas. The power of the Spirit is made available to us. All we have to do is turn on the ignition and press the accelerator.

When you sent your children into the world, you may have told them: "Remember who you are; where you came from." Just as our family heritage can remind us of who we are, so our baptism reminds us that we are the sons and daughters of God. As we discussed on Christmas Eve, we are part of the family of God where we are loved and valued. And as children of God, we are called to share God's love with all we meet through our thoughts, words and actions.

Remember your baptism. Remember the reasons that we just discussed as to why Jesus chose to be baptized. It was a moment of decision. Just as it was a decision point in His life, so it is a decision point in our lives. Because of the freewill that God has given us, we have a daily choice, who will we serve – the world, our selfish desires or Jesus Christ? Will we fulfill the vow we made at our baptism to give Jesus full control of our life and serve Him?

It was a moment of identification. Jesus wanted to be associated with those who had chosen to serve God. Do we want to follow the masses and the latest fads, or do we want to be associated with those who call themselves Christians? Our baptism identifies our commitment to Jesus Christ and our decision to serve Him.

It was also a moment of approval. In baptism God adopts us as His sons and daughters. God claims us as His children and promises that His grace will surround us all our days. And this grace offers assurance that we are loved and cared for, never forgotten, always forgiven, and never alone. Isn't it reassuring that at our baptism God says to each of us: "You are my child; I love you and I am proud of you?"

Finally, it was a moment of equipping. As God equipped Jesus for His ministry, so His Holy Spirit is here to help us in our ministries and service. The Spirit has bestowed on each of us spiritual gifts that are to be used in the service of God. When we accept Jesus into our heart, His Spirit comes to dwell within us, to guide and comfort us along life's journey with all its ups and downs, obstacles, rough places and temptations.

Fred Craddock, a retired Methodist minister, tells a story about his early ministry. He was appointed to a small town in southwest Oklahoma, which had four churches: a Methodist, Baptist, Nazarene, and Christian Church. The attendance rose and fell according to the weather and whether it was time to harvest the wheat. However, the best and most consistent attendance on Sunday morning was at the local diner where all the pickup trucks were parked and all the men were inside discussing the weather, cattle, and whether they were going to have a good crop, while their wives and children were at one of the four churches. The diner had better attendance than any of the four churches. The men were always there.

Once in a while they would lose a member of the diner because his wife or kids finally got to him. They were not bad men; they were basically good, hard-working family men. The patron saint of the diner group was Joe who was 77 years old. He was a good man, and all the men in the diner considered him their hero saying that Old Joe would never go to church.

One day Fred met Joe on the street and introduced himself. Fred didn't push religion and just had a general conversation. However, Joe went on the defense and said: "I work hard and I take care of my family and I mind my own business." He was basically telling Fred to leave him alone; he was not a prospect for his church. So Fred did.

But one Sunday, Fred was surprised, as was the entire church and community, especially the men at the diner, when Joe presented himself to be baptized by Fred. Some thought that Joe was sick and maybe scared to meet his maker. There were all sorts of rumors, but none were true. Fred asked: "Joe, do you remember what you often said to me? I work hard, I take care of my family, and I mind my own business?" Joe said: "Yeah, I remember. I said it a lot." "Do you still say that?" Fred asked. "Yes," he said. "Then what's the difference now?" Fred asked. To which Joe replied: "I didn't know then what my business was!"

Joe discovered what his business was; what our business is. It is to serve God, to love your neighbor as yourself. So Fred baptized Joe. He raised his hand and said in the presence of those gathered: "Upon your confession of faith in Jesus Christ and in obedience of His command, I baptize you in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen."

Do you remember that? Remember your baptism and be thankful. Remember who you are and where you came from. Remember your call and commitment to serve the Lord. Remember what your business is. Now if you have never been baptized and want to, see me. It will be the best decision you will ever make. If you have been baptized and want to renew the vow made at your baptism, you can come forward during the closing hymn and touch the water in a bowl. Thanks to Bonnie Chalfant, some of the water from the Jordan River where Jesus was baptized has been placed in the bowl. Remember your baptism and be thankful!
Amen