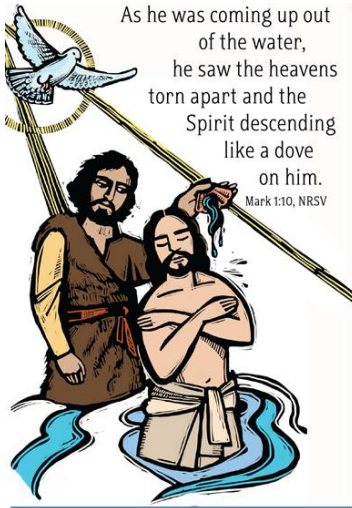


Irondequoit United Church of Christ
January 10, 2021
Sermon



***Meditation:** Jesus is baptized and proclaimed "beloved," chosen for a ministry that will condition his life. Full of God's Spirit, he will himself be tempted, but he will endure; he will call others to follow, and they will be led to obey; he will teach with wisdom that surpasses all earthly knowledge; he will perform acts of healing that reveal God's mercy. Christian ministry begins with baptism, which marks believers as God's chosen people.*

FIRST READING: Genesis 1:1-5 (NRSV)

Out of chaos, God brings order. Out of the primeval darkness, God brings light. This familiar story was good news for the Israelites, who experienced much chaos in their history. It remains good news for any person living in the chaos and darkness of despair. God created and continues to create new life.

In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, ²the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters. ³Then God said, "Let there be light"; and there was light. ⁴And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness. ⁵God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day.

***GOSPEL LESSON: Mark 1:4-11 (NRSV)**

Mark's gospel reports the story of Jesus' baptism with some irony: the one on whom the Spirit descends is himself the one who will baptize others with the Holy Spirit.

⁴John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. ⁵And 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. ⁶Now John was clothed with camel's hair, with a leather belt round his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. ⁷He 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. ⁸I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit." ⁹In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. ¹⁰And 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. ¹¹And a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased."

PRAYER FOR A NEW BEGINNING

Cole/Tilson

O God, your voice can split the heavens, part the waters, divide night from day. It can flash forth fire, shake the wilderness, thunder over the storm. Yet your word so often is heard among us not in the tempest, but in the silence.

Speak to us, O God, and let us listen, that we might detect the whisper of a wing, the rustle of a feather. Let us listen, that we might glimpse the dove and hear the voice that Jesus heard, saying, "You are my beloved; with you I am well pleased."

Speak again to us, O Lord, for when you speak, it is done, and behold, it is very good. *Amen.*

SERMON

“Baptized As A Child Of God, It’s What God Does!”

Rev. Marvin W. Krieger

Before I begin today’s sermon I would like to say: This has been a week like no other in the history of the United States where people who declare that they are for democracy sought to overthrow that very governmental process which they proclaimed to uphold. I would like you to join me in prayer: Gracious, and ever loving God, we come to you this day to ask for your forgiveness and allow us to repent for those times in which we, and others, fall into false rhetoric which produces hate and despair and we ask that you begin to help us as individuals, as a nation, and as a world become instruments of love and understanding so that we can truly repair the damage and mistrust which has been perpetrated. We are challenged as John the Baptizer challenged people of his day to repent and to allow your healing Spirit to enter. Be with us, refresh us! Amen.

I am going to read the words from Genesis, the beginning of our Bible again, this time as I am reading them allow the words to form a picture in your minds:

In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, ²the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters. ³Then God said, "Let there be light"; and there was light.

The author of this biblical chapter shares with us that the earth was a formless void until God took a wind and swept over the face of the waters. This reminds me that we do not stand in the light until we are washed/refreshed in the waters that God has spread over us with his spirit.

Perhaps this is why after repenting John the Baptizer chose water to refresh those who came to him so that they, like the earth, could step out of the darkness and void coming into the light. This week has been a grim reminder that there is still darkness within this world and that we have much to restore light into the world and we must be a part of restoring God's order.

John gathered people at the river "proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins." This wasn't the first time, this was a practice that he did to make people aware of the action which God can take in one's life, this was an act of acknowledging the importance of God's interaction in one's daily life. Herod saw this as an act of undermining his power over the people within the Jewish community and saw John as a continued threat. People began to think of John as not only a prophet but possibly the Messiah himself, to which he made very clear that he was not but that the reality of the Messiah whom they had been waiting for centuries would soon be revealed: *"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. ⁸I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."*

Jesus' baptism was a public event: it happened in the Jordan River, in the light of day. People of all kinds were around and about him, likely gathering water for the day, bathing themselves or their children, and, as witnessed by the text, certainly giving their own lives to the renewal of life through the call and ministry of John. People were there to receive water, one of the substances of which we are made, without it we die; how fitting that John uses water as a symbol of new life and new beginnings in a relationship with God.

Enters Jesus: entering the water, the murky River Jordan, the substance of life for the followers of John and for those who have come there to fulfill their own needs. As the writer of Mark states in his first verse, "This is the beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God." Everyone around the river could surely see Jesus as he approached John in those waters. There waiting with others who had come to be reassured by John that they would beginning anew, a new life blessed by God, as God had blessed the earth with the waters at the beginning of it's creation.

Then it happens as he comes out of the water, an event that all 4 Gospels report: there is the Spirit descends like a dove on this man Jesus and the voice of God declares "*You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.*" It is God's action at the time of Baptism that assures the baptized that they are truly a child of God.

How many of you were Baptized as an infant or child? Often times we hear that people are "rebaptized"; in our traditions we are not to be rebaptized for in the words of Paul in his letter to the Ephesians he states in Chapter 4: 4-6: "4 There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, 5 one Lord, one faith, one baptism, 6 one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all." God has taken action upon us, no matter at what age our baptism took place; however, we can, and should, affirm our Baptism, so that we can bare witness to God's action.

Like Jesus before us, we are now called by God to move forward into our ministry with God, we must move forward into his promise of hope and life for a world which is will bring light to all of his children. When Jesus came up out of the water the Spirit descended upon him like a dove, may we too feel that presence and be renewed.

Jesus took action, and I am going to ask you to take action today to affirm your baptism – I am using the words found on pages 39 and 40 in the UCC New Century Hymnal:

Do you desire to affirm your baptism into the faith and family of Jesus Christ?

I do.

Do you renounce the powers of evil and desire the freedom of new life in Christ?

I do.

Do you profess Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior?

I do.

Do you promise, by the grace of God, to be Christ's disciple, to follow in the way of our Savior, to resist oppression and evil, to sow love and justice, and to witness to the work and word of Jesus Christ as best you are able?

I promise, with the help of God.

Do you promise, according to the grace given you, to grow in the Christian faith and to be a faithful member of the church of Jesus Christ, celebrating Christ's presence and furthering Christ's mission in all the world?

I promise, with the help of God.

Let us unite with the church in all times and places in confessing our faith in the triune God.

Do you believe in God?

I believe in God.

Do you believe in Jesus Christ?

I believe in Jesus Christ.

Do you believe in the Holy Spirit?

I believe in the Holy Spirit.

Let us unite our hearts in prayer:

O God, our God, known to us in Jesus Christ give of themselves to you as your own, to love and serve you faithfully all the days of their lives. Almighty God, who in baptism received these your servants into the church, forgave their sins, and promised them eternal life, increase in them the gifts of your Holy Spirit. Grant love for others, joy in serving you, peace in disagreement, patience in suffering, kindness toward all people, goodness in evil times, faithfulness in temptation, gentleness in the face of opposition, self-control in all things. Thereby strengthen them for their ministry in the world; through Jesus Christ our Savior. Amen

We have affirmed our baptism; therefore, Jesus shares the benefits of all he is with us, making his identity our own. Baptized in him, we too become God's daughters and sons. Baptized in him, we too are named "beloved" and God is truly pleased.

Daughters and sons of God, beloved! We too are chosen. We too, by our living, reveal the voice of God to others. We too are blessed and loved beyond measure.

Amen!