

Sermon for January 11th, 2015 Third Sunday of Christmas

Mark 1:4-11

BLESSINGS TO YOU AND PEACE FROM GOD THE FATHER, OUR LORD
AND SAVIOR JESUS CHRIST, AND THE HOLY SPIRIT. AMEN.

As a pastor, **preaching** on a topic or subject which is **well** known and one that a number of us have heard preached on for **many** years, even **decades**, can be a bit of a challenge. So it is with the baptism of our Lord Jesus.

I would like to **ask** you a question whose answer you may or may not have thought of in a long time—if ever. **What** does your baptism mean to you and **why** does baptism matter anyway? //// I do not know about you, but the words of baptism which were spoken over me when I was a youngster are words which I do **not** remember. What I **do** know is that those words make a difference for us and to us. Words: **remembered or not**; the promises made to us in our baptism are made once and for all.

I have to say that that statement seems to be a **significant source** of encouragement for the families and loved ones at every funeral or memorial service that I have officiated. There is **something about** being a beloved child of God, **sealed** by the Holy Spirit, and **marked** with the sign of the cross of Jesus Christ **forever** that tends to give great comfort and hope in such a time.

I have recently been made aware of a book which is called: ***Waking Up: A Guide to Spirituality without Religion.*** I have not read this book as I **just** heard out about it, but I have read some of the first chapter online. It is written by a man named Sam Harris who claims to be an atheist. Mr. Harris says this about spirituality and religion: *Twenty percent of Americans describe themselves as “spiritual but not religious.” Although the claim seems to annoy believers and atheists equally, separating spirituality from religion is a perfectly reasonable thing to do.* Hmm. Of course, Mr. Harris has his **right** to opinion, but as Christians separating spirituality from religion does **not** seem to be a *reasonable* thing to do. Spirituality and religion for us are one in the same because as believers in God there can be NO separation between **God** the Father, **God** the Son, and **God** the Holy Spirit. That is what the trinity—which comes together in **each** of these form in Jesus’ baptism—is about.

Let’s take a look at what happens not only during Jesus’ baptism but what is proclaimed within our own. It says in Mark’s gospel that as Jesus emerges from the waters of baptism, the heavens were **torn apart**—now the word used in the original Greek was *schidzomi* which means disunited, divided, disjointed, split, or torn. This **is** the Greek word from which **our** word *schizophrenia* comes. This word *schidzomi* is the **same** word that is used at the **end** of Mark’s gospel when Jesus died and the curtain of the temple was **torn** in two from top to bottom.

For the heavens to be torn apart at Jesus' baptism means this can be **no small event!!!!** The **mighty power** of God at work!!!! Then the **affirming** voice from heaven said, 'You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.' Similar words are spoken **to us** when we are baptized. With water we are baptized in the name of the **Father**, of the **Son**, and of the **Holy Spirit**. God has declared His pleasure in us, his utter satisfaction that His creation in us is good, that we are worthy, that we are God's **very own** beloved creatures.

These are the same words which have been used for centuries. They have been used in the most solemn of christenings in the highest and grandest churches and cathedrals in the world and they are the same words which have been said in the **lowliest** of places. It does not matter **where** they are said. They are words that say and promise **much** more than the person **saying** the words can possibly foresee, or the person **receiving** the words can fully understand.

We Lutherans perform **infant** baptisms which some churches do not. Some churches wait until the *'age of understanding'* when a child is old enough to make their **own** confession of faith. In thinking about this idea of the *'age of understanding'* is there **really ever** a time in our lives when we will somehow *'wake up'* and comprehend what God is doing in the act of baptism? Even after **centuries** of consideration, after **much** being written, and after being **debated**

about by the greatest theologians we do not yet fully understand the **mystery** that is the sacrament of Holy Baptism.

So **what** does baptism mean and **why** does it matter anyway? After all, it is **just** a few splashes of water from a faucet or a river and a few words that are said. But, you see, it isn't what **we** are doing that matters. It is what **God** is doing. It is all about **God's** action in the water and the words. Our baptism **matters** because we **belong** to Christ in whom we have been baptized. Our baptism **matters** because it is a reminder that we are who God says we are, **regardless** what anyone else may say about us. Our baptism **matters** because we are reminded that our **true identity** is **not** what we may choose to believe about ourselves or what labels or names the world may ascribe to us. Our baptism matters because **God knows** us, and **His words about** us are always *'beloved child of Mine'*. **This** is what baptism means and **why** it matters.

The **promises** made to us in our baptism are promises for us which God does not go back on, they are **promises** made to us forever. Baptism is a **visible and verbal sign** that we *'count'* to the people who stood **with** us, that we *'count'* to the people who stand **behind** us, that we *'count'* to God, and that we *'count'* to the One who was **without sin** who was baptized that day by John in the Jordan River. The One who came to **save us all**. When we understand as much as humanly possible **what** Jesus **did for us** on that day, we are **never** the same again.

This morning as you pass by the baptismal font, you might **think** about the water and its meaning, to **remember** that God's only Son chose to be baptized to save us from our sin, to **realize** that by that same act **you count** and because of that you and I will never be the same again—how do we **separate** that? Maybe for us the '*waking up*' happens when we realize that as Christians **we cannot separate our spirituality and our religion. AMEN.**