

Sermon for January 12, 2014

The Baptism of our Lord, Matthew 3:13-17

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

Water. It has the **power to give** and to **sustain** life as well as the **power to destroy** it. I remember when I was on internship in North Dakota. On **Sunday** mornings many times the **topic** of conversation between the farmers before the worship service would be how much rain they had gotten at their farms during the week. These men measured the rainfall to 1/100th of an inch. Their livelihood was sustained or in some cases lost by the amount of water they did or did not receive.

In recent years we have seen the **destructive power** of water in the aftermath of hurricane Katrina, hurricane Sandy, and the typhoon in the Philippines. Mass **destruction and devastation** comes in the wake of these powerful storms. Water. It has the **power to give and sustain** life as well as the **power** to destroy it.

On a **human** level our own bodies cannot **survive** without this precious water. Our body weight is made up of about **60%** water. Our health and survival is determined in many ways by water and hydration. It is said that a person can survive without food for about **3 weeks** but humans can only survive

approximately **3 days** without water. We **need** it for life. Water. It has the power to give and to sustain life or destroy it.

Here I have with me some river rocks that I picked up along the banks of the **Rio Grande River** in New Mexico. These rocks have had their **rough edges smoothed** by years of water gently gliding over them—*smoothing out of the rough edges by years of precious water gently gliding over them.*

In this morning's gospel passage we once again hear the story of the baptism of Jesus on the banks of the **river Jordan**. A story that is **crucial** to the beginning of Jesus' ministry in the world. Matthew spells out a very specific purpose for Jesus to visit John, "THEN Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan." Jesus had made the **70 mile trip** from Galilee to the Jordan River with the intention of being baptized by John. **This trip was no coincidence.** This is an event that was ordained by God to happen so Jesus can begin his public ministry. In this act of being **baptized** in the water, **at** the Jordan River, **by** John—Jesus is given the gifts of **identity and affirmation** by God.

In the **opening** of the heavens, in the **descent** of the dove as it lands on Jesus, in the **voice** from heaven coming down saying, "This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased." It **quickly** becomes apparent that this is a baptism **unlike** any other. In this baptism we get a **clear sense** of who Jesus is as

God **acknowledges** Jesus from the heavens. These are **powerful affirmations** to receive **from** our Creator given **to** His Son.

Here for just a moment I would like to reflect on the **first** reading we had for this morning as it is a prophesy which bears **witness** to the baptism. In this Isaiah text we heard the prophet giving comfort to God's people saying, *"Here is my servant, whom I uphold—my chosen—in whom my soul delights. I have put my spirit upon him; he will bring forth justice to the nations. He will not cry or lift up his voice, or make it heard in the street, a bruised reed he will not break, and a dimly burning wick he will not quench; he will faithfully bring forth justice. He will not grow faint or be crushed until he has established justice in the earth; and the coastlands wait for his teaching. Thus says, God, the Lord."* The **way** is set: Jesus' **vocation** is clear. The baptism **has** occurred. God's redeeming love and abundant grace has been **poured out** onto Jesus. Jesus' ministry is on the way.

Jesus' baptism **and** his entry into public ministry reminds **all** believers that baptism marks **our unity** with Jesus as well—**our entry** not into private Christianity, but into public witness, and into our public mission of Jesus to the world.

This morning I have put the baptismal font, filled with life-giving water, right here front and center in the sanctuary. It is a reminder of **not only** Jesus' baptism but is a reminder of our **own** baptism where these words, among others,

were said over us, *“Joined to Christ in the water of baptism, we are clothed with God’s mercy and forgiveness. At the river your Son was baptized by John and anointed with the Holy Spirit. By water and your Word you claim us as daughters and sons, making us heirs of your promise and servants of all. We praise you for the gift of water that sustains life, and above all we praise you for the gift of new life in Jesus Christ. Show us with your Spirit, and renew our lives with your forgiveness, grace, and love.”* We **belong** to Christ in whom we have been baptized.

The **power** of the water of baptism gives and sustains life **unlike** the **power** of any other water. Through Jesus’ baptism where the **sinless** one was **united** with all of us who have sinned we have been **united** with him in a **death** like his; thereby, giving us the promise of eternal life.

The waters of baptism flow over us—water which **gives and sustains everlasting life**. Like the river rocks—precious waters of baptism which continue to gently glide over us during our lives smoothing out our rough edges. **This** is the **life giving water** which **cleanses** us of our sins. **This** is the water which molds us and makes us into the people of God we are. People who are **empowered for ministry** in service **to** God in a **variety** of ways. **All thanks be to God. AMEN.**