

NEW TESTAMENT READING: Mark 1:4-11 pg 34 NT

John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. 5 And 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. 6 Now John was clothed with camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. 7 He 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. 8 I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."

9 In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. 10 And 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. 11 And a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased."

OLD TESTAMENT READING: Genesis 1:1-5 pg 1 OT

1 In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, 2 the 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.

3 Then God said, "Let there be light"; and there was light. 4 And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness. 5 God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day.

“God Speaks and there is Life”

Just to start with a bit of trivia this morning: The Scripture readings each week are usually taken from what is called the Revised Common Lectionary. The RCL is a publication which prescribes readings for each Sunday, readings which over a 3-year cycle will expose congregations which use the RCL to a majority of the Bible. The RCL was created in 1994 by Bible scholars from North America, Britain, Australia and other English-speaking countries, and it represents the Catholic, Episcopal, and Protestant churches. Each week there is a passage from the OT, the Psalms, the NT and the Gospels. At least one theme tends to be in common between the readings, and it is usually obvious but not always. The common theme in today’s readings was not obvious for me...until...until I noted the shared truth: God Speaks and There is life! (*repeat*).

In the Genesis text, the beautiful, poetic, Genesis text, God is proclaimed as Creator of all that is. The world was not self-made. From an untamed and threatening void, GOD created. The Scripture says, God’s Spirit “*moved over the waters,*” or more accurately, God’s Spirit “*danced over the face of the deep*”.¹ And God spoke, “*Let there be...and there was.*” New life came into being via the God’s creative word.² (*REPEAT*) Now, in the Markan text, the day that Jesus was baptized by John is described. “*The heavens were torn apart open*”, and the Holy Spirit moved over the waters of the River Jordan. God said, “*This is my beloved Son*”, and new life in Christ...new order in the chaos, came into being for all who believe. God spoke and there was new life.

You see, when God in Jesus stepped into the Jordan, he identified with us...completely. Jesus, fully God, fully human, came to stand shoulder to shoulder with us, to share our earthly lives and lots; he came to join the ranks with us, suffering sinners, and through his gracious and sacrificial love, to eventually go to the cross on our behalf. Jesus, the voice from heaven made clear, was God’s Son, and he chose to be baptized by John. He chose to be baptized by the repentance-preaching, fire-breathing John, not because he needed to be cleansed of his sins, but

¹Valerie Bridgeman. “*Commentary on Gen 1:1-5*” https://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=3551. (accessed 1/6/2018).

²Wil Willamon. “*Caretakers of God’s Creative Word*” <http://www.ministrymatters.com/all/entry/8651/january-7-2018-caretakers-of-gods-creation>. (accessed 1/6/2018).

because we needed to see that in him, we are released from lives of guilt and shame, from fear of eternal condemnation. We are released to live lives which are forgiven and free, lives which are confident, hopeful and joyous, lives which are NEW! I've read these words to you before, but I'll read them again, fabulous words of the 4th c theologian, Athanasius,: "*Because Jesus so completely joined himself with the mortal flesh, made known in his baptism, his reversal of death is offered to all others who are also flesh. We are exalted through our unity with God the Son as we "appropriate his body" and participate by faith not only in his death but in his risen life through the Holy Spirit.*"³ Yes, friends, God speaks and there is life.

Jesus also stepped into the Jordan to show us that we need not DO anything to be loved. In his baptism, Jesus simply...and, in fact, rather passively...stood in the waters and RECEIVED the gift of the Holy Spirit and the gift of God's favor. David Lose points out that Jesus, in the beginning (remind you of Genesis?), in the beginning of his ministry, Jesus must have longed to hear those divine words claiming him as a beloved son and a pleasure to God. Think how much strength he'd have drawn from them.⁴ Think how we too long to hear our Creator's words of acceptance, identity, and blessing...especially as we face tough times?

They're powerful words spoken to us who really CAN do nothing to earn God's favor, who are called, chosen, claimed even before we are born.... "*You are my child, Ephraim. You are my child Jeremiah, Jamison, River Dawn....You are my child, Mary, Amy, Denise....You are my child, Frank, Grace, Heidi, Marian, Cyndy. You are my child, Janice, Inge, Lotte, Harry, Cora, ...you are my child, Kate, Gail...and I, the Lord, am proud of you....*powerful words which shape us, which transform us from people who feel so unworthy to ones who know we are treasured by God ...powerful words which transform us from people who lack confidence and are afraid to ones who are secure in our promised inheritance and can face the world with a peace which passes understanding...powerful words which give us, once again, new life.

³ Athanasius, "On the Incarnation," in *Introduction to the History of Christianity: Apostolic Era to 1650*, Vol 1, (Austin: Abel's Copies, 2009), 120.

⁴ David Lose. "Powerful Words for a New Year" in *In the Meantime*. <http://www.davidlose.net/2018/01/epiphany-1-b-powerful-words-for-a-new-year/>. (accessed 1-6-18).

*The great Martin Luther was reportedly plagued at times by a sense of unworthiness and despair. To drive back those demons, he kept an inscription over his desk that read, "Remember, you have been baptized." Often, he would touch his forehead, where the cross had been drawn, where the priest had said, "You are child of God and you belong to Jesus Christ forever," to remind himself, "Martin, you have been baptized."*⁵ You know, I recommend that you take a moment today, on the Baptism of the Lord Sunday, to touch your forehead, and remind yourself that you are a child of God. Baptized or not yet baptized, you are a beloved child of God.

James Autry wrote a poem called, "Baptism" which is a favorite of mine. It goes like this:
There is something about putting people under the water and raising them up in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, something that makes people cry.

That makes them want everything to be alright.

*That makes them want to leave this place and be better, to immerse themselves in their lives
And somehow be washed clean of all the things they should not have done and still should not want to do.*

That's it.

*Not the other things...the star in the east, the treasures in heaven, or any of the old stories, not even life after death. It's only "to be new again".*⁶

Yes, friends, Our Creator God speaks and there is life.

And finally, when Jesus stepped into the Jordan, he made it clear for all time, for all people, that the source of his power was the Holy Spirit, the Spirit from Heaven, the Spirit of God. We see Jesus standing there in the water, shoulder to shoulder with us, puny, weak humans, and we realize that what belongs to the him belongs to us. We we too will be "empowered" on our Christian journeys. We can take on the problems at home or in the community. We can be bold to make a difference in the concerns of the world or our personal lives. We can live in but not of the world and through him and his power, be instruments of his peace, bearers of his

⁵ Joanna Adams. "God Believes in You". http://day1.org/1678-god_believes_in_you. (accessed 1-7-17).

⁶ James Autry. "Baptism" In: Nights Under a Tin Roof. (Oxford, MS: Yoknapatawpha Press;1983).

love, participants in the divine work of bringing the Kingdom. Hear the words of the apostle Paul, *“We, who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death... Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. Our God speaks and there is life.*

There is new life that is lived free and forgiven, new life which is lived confident of worth and value, new life which is lived purposefully and energized for service. So we now consider those, who come today to be ordained/installed. **THEY ARE RESPONDING TO THEIR BAPTISMAL CALL TO SERVE** with what they and others have identified as gifts for church leadership. They have renounced sin, and declared Jesus as their Lord and Savior. They are compelled by the fire of the Holy Spirit and a love of Christ’s church to be his disciples. They have been recognized by this congregation as spiritually mature and committed to Presbyterian principles of government. They have received training, have been examined and approved by Session. They do not have “special or higher” qualities, or in ordination are being placed "above" or "better" than. (*SLOWLY*) Rather, through their ordination promises, they ground themselves in a posture of servitude, as did Christ in his baptism, and they pledge to support the people of the church as they live out the fullness of their baptismal covenant.

As the congregation sings now the first and third verse of hymn #482, “Baptized in Water”, I ask you to remember your baptisms, and I also ask Gail Batman, Kate Peirce-Burleson and Ruling Elder Kathy Lopez to come forward.