

St. Mark's Episcopal Church
Albuquerque, New Mexico
Sunday January 10, 2021 Feast of the Baptism of our Lord.
Preacher: The Rev. Christopher McLaren
Theme: Remember your baptism.
Text: Mark 1:4-11

Over the weekend I had the pleasure of walking along the Bosque where the path made its way down to the river. It was wonderful to be near the water, to hear the sound of it rushing by chattering over the rocks and to see the deep pools in the bends of the river. The water of the Rio Grande was a beautiful clear green that made it seem inviting though of course it was a bit cold for wading. We could see the remains of a rope swing that went out over the deep water and that seemed exciting, just a little dangerous and fun. In this season of Epiphany, we remember the baptism of Jesus, so it is good to get near the water, even to try to touch the water. In the ancient church the feast was often celebrated near the water and people made a point of getting wet, touching the flow of water or collecting some in containers remembering that the Holy Spirit hovered over the waters at the dawn of creation and descended upon the waters at Jesus' baptism. So too we can envision ourselves wading out into the water to the wild man Johnny B. as Jesus did to be held under that life-giving water, to open ourselves up to the life of the Spirit, to seek the presence of God in our lives. This Sunday, The Feast of the Baptism of Jesus is an opportunity for each of us to remember our baptism and the gift of God we all received in that holy bath and be thankful.

Now I realize that many of us were baptized when we were quite young, so we don't actually remember much about our baptism. Sometimes I'm a little jealous of those who were baptized as youth or adults for the memory of the experience. In the church, we don't baptize people again just because they can't remember it, we trust that the Spirit was active and present with the water was poured over them in the name of the Trinity, that God's grace precedes our knowledge of its presence. I was baptized in a big tank behind where the choir sang when I was 6 years old, so I have some memories of that special day. I remember running up to a family friend on the sidewalk after the rite saying, I became a Christian today!

But whether we remember the day of our baptism or not, every time there is a baptism in church (We've all been missing them in covid-time) or when we have a feast where we re-new our own baptismal promises, like today, we are in fact remembering our baptism and reclaiming the power of what it means to have the Spirit of God present and active in our lives that was given at baptism.

We proclaim the baptism of Jesus not just to remember how special his baptism was with the heavens opening and the spirit descending upon him like a dove and to hear those beautiful words coming from heaven "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased, but connect with our own baptism. We not only celebrate the

baptism of Jesus in the muddy waters of the Jordan River and his solidarity with all humanity, but we also celebrate the gift of the Spirit in our own baptisms and ask God to renew that life-giving and transformational presence of the Spirit within us. We are Spirit endowed people by nature of our baptism.

To be sure baptism is meant to be watery and wet and I encourage you to get a little wet today, get a bowl of water from the kitchen since we can't spritz you down with asperges online though we will do our best. You know how we love to soak people down the aisles on these baptismal days. But baptism is not only about water and getting wet, it is about the Spirit and being filled with the power and presence of God as one who desires to be a follower of Jesus. The Holy Spirit, is God enlivening our reading and hearing of scripture, empowering us to live our lives for Christ, a gift breathed upon us at our baptisms.

So, this day I bid you to remember your baptism by the Holy Spirit and be happy and open to what God wants to do in and through you.

Oh, what is that you say, you're not sure that you are a Spirit-led person. What that sounds a little wild, a little Pentecostal, a little uncontrollable? Listen father Christopher, you may have grown up a Pentecostal Charismatiac, but this is the Episcopal Church, and you are not supposed to scare us with talk about the Spirit churning within us, active and alive and urging us to live as God desires, can't you just talk about how Jesus' baptism was good and proper and necessary to fulfill all righteousness?

How do I remember my baptism anyway?

Remember the evening when you were at the school board meeting and the board was discussing the challenge of student diversity in the school. Somebody at the meeting said something like, "Diversity, diversity. I'm tired of hearing about all that. I think a lot of these minorities have done a good bit of whining. The schools ought to treat everybody the same and let it go at that."

And from somewhere in you there came words. You almost couldn't believe that you were hearing yourself say, "I'd like to say that as a parent, I want my children to have the experience of going to school with a rich diversity of students—and teachers. I think that's important, not just because of the educational benefits of having a diverse group of students but also because, well, my Christian faith helps me to appreciate the rich array of cultures, languages and persons that God has created and blessed. That is a big part of why I'm committed to public schools." Did you actually say that? Aren't you quite a shy person who doesn't really like conflict? Did you find yourself being a witness to God's creative and wild diversity in the world? Remember your baptism and be courageous!

Remember the time when your good friend was going through the struggle of their life with alcohol. His addiction had gotten the best of him and he had lost almost

everything, and he called you? “I’m just not strong enough to fight off these demons he said. I don’t think I’m going to make it through this, I just can’t face life anymore.” And you drove over to his house, put your arm around him and said, “I believe that, while you can’t defeat this on your own, God wants you to bring healing into your life. I believe that, with God’s help, you can overcome this. Let’s pray together. I’ll pray, then you pray. God can help.” Do you remember how you helped him get into treatment, went to AA meetings with him until he found a sponsor and continued to support him along the way.

That was you, a person who kind of likes to think of their faith as private and there you were praying with your friend and telling him what God desired. Remember your baptism and be compassionate!

Remember when you were talking to your friend who was worried about his kids struggling with online math and needing some help. Remember how you said, I used to teach math, I love math and I would love to help your son learn math and I would have fun doing it. And then you met every week with them, and they discovered that they really could do math with some encouragement and patience and they actually not only passed the class but got a pretty darn good grade too. Remember your baptism and care for others!

Or do you remember that day you wandered into church distracted and a little resentful that you’d bothered to show up as you had so much else that you needed to be doing? And then there was that song that changed everything, “Awake, awake to love and work! ... ”

*To give and give, and give again,
What God hath given thee;
To spend thyself nor count the cost;
To serve right gloriously
The God who gave all worlds that are,
And all that are to be.*

As the music poured over you something happened, something awakened in you in a way you couldn’t explain. The message was for you, right there, right when you needed it, God was present to you in a way you could hardly put into words, but it was undeniable. Remember your baptism and be amazed!

Remember when that person from your mechanic’s shop was telling you about how she was having a tough time making ends meet after being out of work during the pandemic. She told you how she felt overwhelmed by the bills, worried about the future. Remember how you stuck your hand in your wallet and pulled out all the cash you had and just put it in her hand? “It’s not much,” you said, “but I hope it’s a reminder that you are not in this alone. Lots of us are pulling for you.”

You aren't that generous usually. You are careful about which causes you contribute to and which ones don't deserve your gifts. Still, you gave, impulsively, without thinking about it. Remember that? Remember how, a day later, after you had thought the whole thing over, you went back to the garage, handed her a Smith's gift card and said, "I want you go to the grocery store tonight when you get off work. Buy your family everything you need for the rest of the month." But that time, your generosity wasn't an impulse. It was something you really wanted to do, something you had carefully thought through. Your giving was you. Remember your baptism and be generous!

Remember that time you were standing on the soccer sideline and the father of one of your son's teammates started calling the referee by racial slurs and your anger began to build. Remember how you took a little time to breath and collect yourself and then you found yourself saying, "You know sir, when you talk about other human beings in ways that do not respect their dignity, I find it offensive and I would ask you not to use that language in my presence or on the sidelines as it spoils this beautiful game and its demeaning to others' humanity." Do you remember the look of shock on his face when you said that and how he became quiet? That was you facing into conflict when you hardly ever do, telling the truth without worrying about the consequences. Remember your baptism and be bold! Remember the time your friend told you that he and his wife had separated, and he was going to a hotel. Remember how you said, we have an extra room here you can use. It will be better for you to be here than by yourself while you process and work through this. Remember what a blessing it was to that couple that you were there to support them through that crisis as they found help and reconciled. Remember your baptism and be gracious!

Remember the time you had to tell your friend or family member that what they were saying just didn't seem truthful at all to you. Remember how hard it was to say that you wanted to understand them, and you were trying to but that their way of talking was so disturbing and distorted that it was difficult to stay in the relationship. Remember how the spirit was there trying to hold you steady and keep you calm. Remember your baptism and be truthful!

Remember that when you were enlisted into the Christian life, you were given what you needed to persist in the Christian life. You were given a commission to live your life as a Christian, but you were also given the gift you needed to be able to fulfill that calling. You were given the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Sometimes people have called the Holy Spirit "the shy member of the Trinity." We don't hear much about the Holy Spirit in mainline Protestant Christianity, that's a shame. Our reading from Acts today makes it clear in the story of Apollos and his converts that just because you have not heard of the Holy Spirit does not mean that the Holy Spirit doesn't exist and that it was not given to you. Christ has not left you

to your own devices. You don't have to be a Christian on your own. You have been given the gift that you need in order to live out this faith.

Maybe you forgot you had the gift of the Spirit, or maybe you didn't even know that you had received it. The good news is that you have been given the gift by the power of God, working within you to be God's person in the world when it is most needed. The life of the Spirit isn't just for Jesus, it's for each of us. You are in fact God's beloved with whom he is well pleased, listen to him!

Remember your baptism in the Holy Spirit and be the amazing person God's desires you to be in this world, because it's pretty clear, especially after this week that the world needs exactly who God has made you to be. The world needs people who will remember their baptism and be courageous, compassionate, amazed, caring, bold, generous, gracious, and truthful. Today is a good day to remember who you are and to whom you belong. Remember that at your baptism, you were sealed by the Holy Spirit and marked as Christ's own forever.

Amen.