

MATTHEW 3: 13-17

In the name of God Father Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Well congratulations on getting out in the cold weather. Several years ago, I had a habit of meeting on Thursday morning, with two other clergy. . . we met in a coffee shop and we were friends. . . one was a Methodist the other a Baptist.

One day, the Methodist minister and I arrived before our Baptist friend and the Methodist said, "Just wait to Joe gets here" . . . and so when Joe arrived my Methodist friend said, "Well let's talk about baptism this morning."

Now remember. We Episcopalians *pour* water over the person to be baptized. . . The Methodist sprinkle. . . Baptist immerse.

So my Methodist friend said to Joe, "Now tell me. . . .If I get the water up to here, is he or she baptized?" . . . *Well, No. . . .*"What about up to here?" *Well no*"Up here?" . . . he said *yeah it's got to be over the head. . .* and my Methodist friend said. ". . . that's where we began."

Well, while pouring is the norm for us. . . . we will immerse. I once served a parish in Memphis that had a swimming pool next to it. And I kept waiting for somebody to want to be immersed. . . I really wanted that to happen.

I sort of buy into the baptismal axiom. . . . *The wetter the better.* So at baptisms I splash a lot of water on the child. Regardless of the amount of water, baptism is the prime sign of becoming a Christian. Most of us were baptized as infants. And we constantly need reminding of why we were given the grace that comes with baptism and what it means.

It's a powerful . . .powerful symbol. . . . but it's really more than a symbol. We believe it is a sacrament. Remember the definition of a sacramentof course you do. *It's an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace.*

The outward and visible sign of baptism is water, in which the person is baptized in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. The inward and spiritual grace and baptism is union with Christ in His death and resurrection; birth into God's family, the church; forgiveness of sins and new life in the Holy Spirit. Now of course you know that. You remember your catechism. I know.

But the most important thing to remember. Is that God is the chief actor. Baptism is a symbol of His love for humanity. It is a symbol of His hope for you and for me to live in Him.

On on this first Sunday after the Epiphany, we always celebrate the baptism of our Lord in the River Jordan, by John the Baptist. Jesus didn't need to be baptized and at first, John objects. As we read in Matthew's Gospel, John would have prevented Him saying, *I need to be baptized by you . . . and to you come to me.* But Jesus prevailed and was baptized. And as He came up from the water of voice from heaven was heard, **"This is my Son the beloved with whom I am well pleased."**

By His baptism Jesus identified with humanity. By His baptism, Jesus was connecting with us. Connections. . . .relationships. . . they sustain us. . . . they nurture us. . . .they support us. . . . they identify us. We are who we are by definition of our connections.

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I think I've told you before when I was a teenager I remember my mother saying to me some time shouting at me as I left the house to go out with my friends, "Remember who you are. . . remember who you are. . ." I suppose she was hoping that would keep me from wrong doing. . . and sometimes at work.

In a similar way, God is saying to us through our baptism, Remember who you are.. . that's what God was doing at Jesus' baptism, He was saying to the world. . .remember who Jesus is, this IS MY SON. The baptism of Jesus showed his connection with the father. And in *our* baptism we find our connection to the Father. We enter into the status of children of God. . .and we discover our connectedness.

But the connection that's made in Baptism is not just vertical. It's not just between God and me. It's also a horizontal connection. All who are baptized into Christ become members of Christ and members of one another. We belong to one another. We become brothers and sisters in him through our participation in our baptism.

Some of the more evangelical churches speak of their members as brothers and sisters. . .in the Episcopal church, that's not our tradition. But that practice is exhibiting an important truth and that is we are connected. . . as members of a family are connected. . . as brothers and sisters are connected. We are connected, not because of what we are or what we've done, but because of who Jesus is and what Jesus has done. . . and it begins in our baptism. In baptism, we are forgiven our sins and perhaps we need to be reminded of that truth time after time.

When forgiveness happens, a person gains a new orientation in life. When forgiveness happens, a person is given the gift of new possibilities. When forgiveness happens, a person gets a new motivation for forgiving others. And my friends don't forget this truth, Forgiveness has happened. . . Forgiveness is happening. Forgiveness will happen and God does that. We are connected to God's forgiveness in our baptism . . .and now. . . now we can live as forgiven people.

And doesn't the world need forgiveness now. I shudder, when I hear the news of rampant hate crimes. . . of shootings at airports or here in our own neighborhoods in Chattanooga. Violence racks the world and sin seems to reign. And to despair. . . to despair is tempting but remember this. God is still working his purpose out and we must not despair. . . but live in the hope of the salvation of all.

Don't forget what St. Peter said in this morning's second lesson from the Acts of the Apostles. "*I truly understand that God shows no partiality but in every nation, anyone who fears Him and does what is right is acceptable to Him.*" Peter lived in the time of great violence. His life was ended by being crucified upside down. And yet in the midst of that horrific time, he never lost hope. He knew that God accepted and loved all who feared him and Peter devoted himself to teaching that love to the world.

You and I are connected through our baptism to the God who sees *all* as his beloved children. It began with Jesus' baptism, it continues in our baptism and it's all about being connected to God and to each other.

You and I need to continually be reminded of who we are and just how much God loves us. And that's why I enjoy the aspersions at the end of this service. When I sprinkle you with holy water and I see you ducking and you see me laughing. But it's a joyful thing. . . because that water is a joyful reminder of our baptism. That you and I are God's beloved children through our baptism. So don't forget Who You Are. . .Amen.