

SERMON: "Baptized Into Action" – Baptism of The Lord – Jan. 10, 2010
Text; Luke 3: 17-17, 21-22 & Acts 8:14-17

One of the favorite moments for me as a pastor is to baptize infants, children, youth, and adults into the Body of Christ. What happens is a mystery. It is incredible to see visually that grace of Christ poured over the person. It is incredible to see squirmy, sometimes crying children, suddenly become calm and go trustingly into the arms of a stranger as they are welcomed into the Body of Christ. As I give the child back to the parents I sense the beginning of an incredible faith journey. I can't wait to see what happens in their lives. I am always disturbed when the baptized or the parents of the baptized seemly drop out of sight. It is like a great divorce. The church is separated from one of its beloved sisters and brothers. More times than I like to admit, baptism especially infant or child baptism is seen as an end not a beginning. Usually the thought goes something like this, "Yep we've had the child baptized so that's that we can now go about our lives as usual."

It is so common to look at today's story of our Lord's Baptism and see it as an end instead of a beginning for him and for us, his followers. Today we are going to explore what this story proclaims about Jesus Christ, and what this means for us today as baptized believers in Jesus Christ.

First what does John the Baptist say about Jesus? The crowd gathered around John the Baptist asks if he is the long awaited Messiah. John makes it clear he is not. What makes the difference is that John baptized with water as an action of repentance. Jesus will baptize with the Holy Spirit and fire, in verse 16. Since the Spirit can also mean, "wind". John could be saying that Jesus will

baptize with wind and fire. This reflects the Pentecost experience we have in Acts, also written by Luke. John probably saw in the Spirit and fire as purification. With Jesus comes judgment. For those who repent, the wind and fire are seen as a wind that blows away the chaff, the sin, and as a refiners fire, the fire is seen as to burn away sin. For those unrepentant there is separation from God, and destruction. I wonder how many truly wanted this Messiah to come with such power?

Then our text moves us to Jesus' baptism. Jesus arrives at the Jordan along with all the other repentant people and is baptized although he was in no need to repent from sin. He enters the waters of baptism for a different reason, to make a complete identification statement with the people he came to rescue. He came to be with sinners, us, all of humanity then, now, and in the future. .

It was after his baptism when he was praying that something powerful happens. Suddenly the heavens open up and the dove in bodily form comes down. The Holy Spirit comes upon him and he is empowered to carry out the ministry that God has commissioned him to do. His ministry of Divine judgment was now to begin through compassion, love, dieing on the cross, and being resurrected, and finally ascended back up to God. He came so that we may know God's love completely and be transformed in that love. He came that we in our baptism can be empowered with the same Holy Spirit and continue Christ's transforming work in the world. Jesus Christ in the Holy Spirit came, as God, to bring us back Home with God.

Jesus was and is a person of action and purpose, not a man who lived long ago whose action stopped then. Jesus is not a proper noun. Jesus is a verb. Jesus is action. Jesus is redeeming, loving, accepting, reaching out, saving, transforming, healing, calling, and creating. The Holy Spirit is the force by which his actions were carried out.

Then the voice from heaven was heard. This voice of God affirms that “The Beloved” was God’s Son. This affirms that Jesus was not just a man, he was also fully God. Jesus is the Son of God and will be about God’s plans on this earth.

Now what does this all mean for us? First, in baptism and in our confirmation, a point in our lives when we take on our baptism vows for ourselves, we commit ourselves to Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior, and we repent from sin. This means we submit to ourselves to the love and grace of Christ to transform us. We do not stay the same in our journey with Christ. Remember that Jesus Christ is a verb. He works himself into the core of our lives. He becomes part of the way we breathe, think, and live. He comes to feed us for the work the action we do on his behalf. In baptism we are joined to his works of justice and mercy for the whole world. In our baptism we become active agents in the ministry of Christ.

This is scary. It is easier to confess Jesus as a proper noun for we don’t have to do anything. But as a verb, confessing means doing. We cannot be complacent with the injustice in our world. We can no longer keep within these walls and our faith to ourselves as we see people ravaged by sin and death. We

the church must go and be with those in our families, neighborhoods, and communities that don't know this Jesus or at least don't know the freedom and love we have in Him. We can no longer turn and walk away from the suffering we see in our homes, neighborhoods, city, nation, and world. We have to be involved. Yes we were baptized into action by Christ and empowered and led by the Holy Spirit to do his ministry.

What would the world look like if each Christian that has been baptized are people of action, not just word. I know we do many things of ministry in Christ name. Know this it is not in vain, for we are doing them in the power of the Holy Spirit. But consider this, action in Christ isn't just to comfort by human presence, but action is involved enough to allow Christ to change their lives. Giving food is good, we are called to do this, but we are also called to get to know people who are hungry and offer them God's caring love to them. Maybe what they hunger for is more than physical food, it is God's love and acceptance of them.

We are not here this morning just to look at the cross and feel that yes, Jesus loves me and that's it. We are not here this morning to be in close community with friends and family and then come back the next Sunday to get our weekly fix. No we are called and empowered by the baptism of the Holy Spirit in our lives to carry out God's call out into the world in the powerful name of Jesus Christ.

In a few moments we will ordain and install officers of the church. This call as an officer began in their baptism. It was a time when they were sealed in

the Holy Spirit and marked as Christ forever. It was a moment that Christ the verb entered their lives and still today they are people of action that will serve Christ and Christ's church with their lives. It is a time when we are the church will use our lives to follow their leadership and carry out the ministry of this church. Although they are ordained and installed as officers of the church, they need each of us to use our gifts and talents to carry out the mission of the church. At this New Year lets let fear paralyze us, or apathy that sucks the life out of us. Let this special service of ordination and installation empower us to go and take action as baptized believers in Christ!

Let us pray:

Even as the waters of baptism renewed Jesus' sense of mission and linked him forever with all humanity, so may the waters of our baptism remind us that we are your new creation and that our transgressions are forgiven. May the cleansing waters of our baptism wash away the thoughts and deeds that hold us captive. Send your Holy Spirit upon us, cleanse us, and send us forth upon your mission empowered with the same assurance voiced to your Son. "You are my sons and daughters, whom I love; with you I am well pleased." With the prophets of old, help us to declare: "Here we are, Lord, send us!" Amen.