

Straight from the "Hart"

Worship Service from January 09, 2022

Baptism of the Lord Sunday



Welcome and Announcements



Pastor Chuck is recovering from eye surgery and can't be with us today, but Terri Priess and Mary Jo Bell will present the service. Last week, Jesus was 12 years old. This week he is nearing 30 and beginning his ministry, signified by the day he was baptized by John in the Jordan River. This is Baptism of the Lord Sunday, and the reason we have the imagery of baptism more central on the platform today.

Opening Prayer

Lord, we have entered a season when you make yourself known to us and call us to be servants of your Son Jesus Christ. Free us to give of ourselves to this very worthwhile calling. Accept us as we offer ourselves as a profound gesture of our desire to serve you always and today; the day we gather to remember Jesus' trip to the Jordan, when the Spirit was poured out on him so that he in turn could pour your Spirit out on us -- sealing the covenant made through Jesus Christ. Amen.

Call to Worship (L - Leader C - Congregation)

L: You who are godly, give the Lord the glory due his name, honor him for his glory and strength.

C: We will worship the Lord in the splendor of his holiness.

L: For the voice of the Lord is over the waters. He thunders over the mighty rushing waters.

C: The voice of the Lord is powerful and majestic.

L: He sits enthroned above the flood as king forever! May he bless and give strength to his people!

C: While in his temple, all cry, "Glory!"

Let's sing our creedal song -- about why we want to give the Lord his due.

Music (Creedal) *We Believe*

And because this is what we believe, it is why we are here, reading this script -- to give him his due for all he has done for us and our world.

Music *Here I Am to Worship*

Theme We just finished a worship series called “Longing for home”. “Home” being not so much a place as a way that people relate to each other -- where safety and peace and acceptance and happiness and love abounds. The new series is about “God calls” and is how to take part in helping create that kind of environment in our world...to put it biblically -- to pray and work toward God’s kingdom, God’s home coming to earth as it is in heaven.

Henry Hallam Tweedy tries to capture that “place” in his poem. (Two readers alternate on each stanza)

<p>Of all the houses in the world the one that I love best is that in which I wake and play and lay me down to rest.</p> <p>My father built it by his toil; my mother makes it home; you cannot find a lovelier place no matter where you roam.</p> <p>The rooms are clean and bright and fair with pictures, books, and toys, and food, and clothes, and beds, and chairs for all the girls and boys.</p> <p>We children work and care for it, and help to keep it clean, our palace of true happiness, where mother reigns of queen,</p> <p>In father guards us with his strength, a wise and gracious king, to whom we paid honor due, and glad obedience bring.</p> <p>So full of love enjoy it is, so safe and bright and warm, I would not go too far from it lest I should come to harm.</p>	<p>And yet when I go out-of-doors and I look up at the sky, I know I’m in my Father’s house, and that his love is nigh.</p> <p>For God’s Father – Mother, too! The world is my big home; the green grass is the carpet, and the blue sky is the dome.</p> <p>On every side are pictures; the fields are full of food; and all the things that God has made are beautiful and good.</p> <p>He keeps me by his mighty power, he loves me as his child; his paths are bright with happiness, his laws are just and mild.</p> <p>And all his children in this house; so wonderful and fair, should love each other, learn his truth and trust his love and care.</p> <p>I thank thee Father, for these homes, where we may dwell with Thee, and cast out fear and share the joys thou givest full and free.</p>
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Responsive Reading (L – Leader, C – Congregation)

Of course, for many of us, we have a long way to go before our world will feel like that. In the days of Isaiah 43, the people were in exile, prisoners to the Babylonian Empire. They didn't feel at home at all, in physical space or in ways of relating to others. The Hebrew word for God in this text is Adonai (add-doe-nigh) which emphasizes God's mastery, rulership, ownership. This is what he says to the people through his prophet Isaiah....)

L: But now this is what *Adonai* says, This is what the Lord says he who created you, [Jacob], he who formed you, Israel:

C: **“Don't be afraid, for I have redeemed you; I am summoning you, calling you by your name; you are mine.**

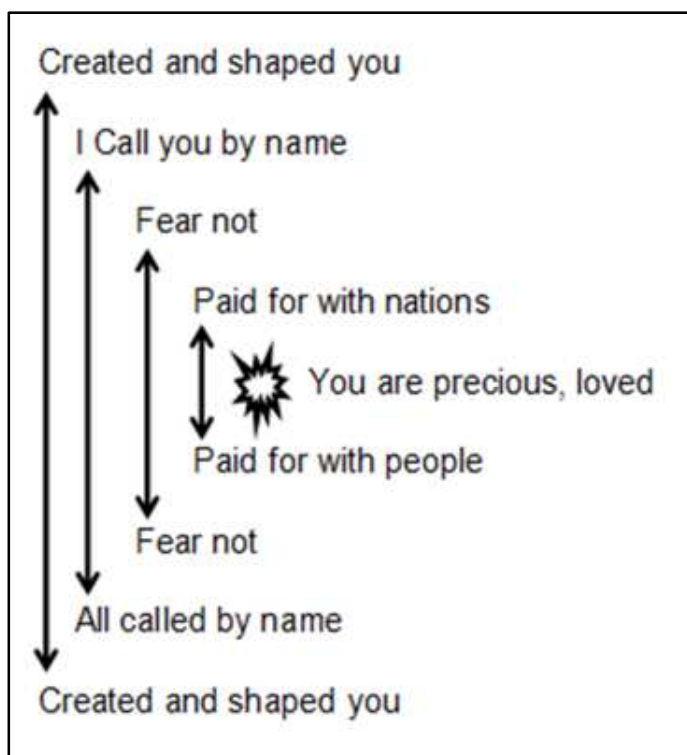
L: When you pass through water, I will be with you; when you pass through rivers, they will not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire, you will not be scorched — the flame will not burn you. For I am *Adonai*, the Lord your God, the Holy One of Isra'el, your Savior — I have given Egypt as your ransom, Ethiopia and {its province} [Seba] (see-bah) for you.

C: **Because I regard you as [precious,] valued and honored, and because I love you.**

L: For you I will give people, nations in exchange for your life. Don't be afraid, for I am with you. I will bring your descendants from the east, and I will gather you from the west; I will say to the north, 'Give them up!' and to the south, 'Don't hold them back! Bring my sons from far away, and my daughters from the ends of the earth,

C: **everyone who [is called by] and bears my name, whom I created for my glory — [whom I formed and made].”** Isaiah 43:1-7 (CJB with NIV)

See the structure of this poem. The mirror-like wrapping of the text points to the center, and the center is the key point of the passage -- everything flows to and from that central point -- that it good times or bad -- we are precious and



loved and everything God did and does is based on his reverent compassion for his people.

Whether we live in days when it feels like we are overwhelmingly protected, or in days when we are overwhelmingly vulnerable -- whether the Lord gives, or takes away -- whether he blesses, or withholds, we can be sure it is out of his great love for us, and that is why we bless his name.

Music ***Blessed Be Your Name***

Prayers

Let's continue to give the Lord his due for all he's done as we prepare our hearts for prayer by singing Offering...

Prayer Music

Offering

The sun cannot compare to the glory of your love;
there is no shadow in your presence.

No mortal man would dare to stand before your throne,
before the Holy One of heaven.

It's only by your blood and it's only through your mercy, Lord, I come.

I bring and offering of worship to my King.

No one on earth deserves the praises that I sing.

Jesus, may you receive the honor that you're due.

O Lord I bring and offering to you.

(Partial lyrics)

Pastor's Prayer Dear Lord and King, you alone are worthy of the honor you deserve and we do bring ourselves to you in prayer and worship. Pour out your Spirit of grace and love. Warm our hearts and focus our thoughts, that we may worship and live with renewed energy.

Speak to us as our hearts remember our baptism, or at least, the meaning of being spiritually reborn through your grace. Your voice moves over the waters. Immerse us in your grace, mark us with your image, call us to rise up as your people, to live faithfully and courageously.

As Jesus embraced his mission in the waters of baptism, inspire us with the fire of your Spirit to join in his transforming work through the practice of compassion and mercy. This is why we offer our prayers for each other and for the world.

Praises and Petitions We pray for * the eradication of covid, we pray for peace and healing to the sick, peace and healing to those who have lost family members,

healing to our world. * pastor - we ask that you would heal our pastor -- that you would heal and bring him back to us * We thank you for Donna Allmond who is progressing, and Jan Martin asks that we pray for lone Bennett who went into one of the Polsey? homes yesterday, and for a friend Reba Almed who is having a test done today. * and Lord you know the ones that are not spoken, you know the troubled hearts and minds and we just ask that you give them peace -- that you wrap your loving arms around them and you let them feel your closeness. Now cleanse us that we may experience your acts of love and healing power in the name of the one who taught us to pray. **Lord's Prayer**

Intro to and Bible Reading

As we've heard, this is Baptism of the Lord Sunday. People went out into the countryside to hear John's ministry of good news: that if they repented, if they turned away from their sins, that God would forgive them. Their desire to seek God's favor -- and acceptance of his message through John -- was shown by their water baptism into this new thing that God was doing. This is the day that Jesus, though not needing to repent or be cleansed of sin, came to the Jordan to join with those who craved a deeper relationship with God. Luke sums the story this way:



The people were waiting. They were expecting something. They were all wondering in their hearts if John might be the Messiah. John answered them all, "I baptize you with water. But one who is more powerful than I am will come. I'm not good enough to untie the straps of his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His pitchfork is in his hand to toss the straw away from his threshing floor. He will gather the wheat into his barn. But he will burn up the husks with fire that can't be put out." John said many other things to warn the people. He also announced the good news to them... When all the people were being baptized, Jesus was baptized too. And as he was praying, heaven was opened. The Holy Spirit came to rest on him in the form of a dove. A voice came from heaven. It said, "You are my Son, and I love you. I am very pleased with you."

Luke 3:15-17, 21-22 (NIRV)

And as the Holy Spirit came on Jesus, Jesus in turn offers to gift us with his Spirit. Let's stand before the sermon and welcome the Spirit to come upon us again.

Music *Holy Spirit*

Sermon **God Calls Us to Himself** (presented by Terri Priess)

We mentioned that last week, Jesus was 12 and nearing his time of receiving the full privileges, responsibilities, and accountabilities for his own faith journey. For him it was called a Bar mitzvah. For United Methodists, it is called confirmation. Pastor Chuck grew up in a denomination that reserved baptism and membership for this general age frame. He and some Jr Hi friends from the church went through the class together and at the end, we were



told that each of us had to recite from heart a section from the Articles of Faith in front of the church's 200 people. That was bad enough, for pastor never opened his mouth even in front of small groups. Then the church (along with other churches) rented a church in downtown Lansing that had a built in baptistry pool. If you can imagine a rectangle sanctuary, then to the right of the front platform there was a wall with widow curtains on it. When the curtains were parted it would reveal a window frame – no glass, and on the other side of it was an opening into a medium blue room with as scenic background to the pastor and baptismal candidate standing in the pool in front of that window frame.

He was glad he didn't have to do it the year the host church forgot to turn the pool heater on. Some couldn't enter that near icy water and had to walk around so the pastor could sprinkle the water on them through the "window".

The year our never-say-a-word pastor was baptized, their small group was sitting in a pew waiting for their turn to go back behind the platform and get ready to be baptized when the pastor walked up and said, "Oh by the way, you are supposed to give a testimony to the congregation right before you are baptized. It was like the icy water of that other year sliced through his head down to his gut. But he managed to sputter out a couple sentences, now long forgotten, but something about his desire to live for Jesus.

It was a desire to escape Roman persecution and to live for God that drew the people out into the wilderness to find John the Baptist, hear his message and be baptized. His world was very familiar with

John's baptism

ceremonial purifications, some were even prescribed by the Old Testament. By the time of Jesus', Jews had developed a practice of baptism for those who were converting to Judaism. This baptism symbolized washing away the uncleanness of their former non-Jew lives and grafting them into the people of God.

But John's baptism was not a ceremonial nor a sacramental purification, nor was it for those only outside the Jewish faith. At its core, John's baptism was a public declaration that a person was prepared to meet the coming Messiah. That preparation was accomplished by an ethical movement of "repentance for the remission of sins", That is, people prepared themselves for the Messiah's coming by embracing what is good and right and by repenting (turning away from) what it is bad and wrong in their life -- leading to remission (like a disease that goes away) it leads to an absence of sin and its power in our life.

**for preparation
for repentance
for remission**

This new movement of God became so popular and created such a powerful and exhilarating experience that people began thinking that John himself might be the Messiah. When we anticipate and prepare, it is easy to then misconceive what we think God wants and what God is doing because of how the experience makes us feel. It is easy to not only rejoice in what God is doing, but to get caught up in the hype surrounding the success.

Luckily, John was very clear about who he was and his role. He recognized the importance of his preparatory work, but also knew that compared to who followed, his was only background work that would soon drift into the shadows as the true light of the world shines. He could only help bring about an outward desire and effort to live differently in hope of a new relationship with God, while it was only Christ himself, who by the Holy Spirit; would work an inward purifying change that would truly cleanse away sin and its power, making a relationship with God and new direction in life truly possible.

John's role

His role was not to draw attention to himself and the success of his ministry, but to point the people to the work God was doing in the coming Christ (the translation we read today said he "*will* come", but the original language is present tense -- he is *already coming*).

His role was also to encourage them to be sincere in their repentance, because Christ brings the good news of forgiveness of sins and inward renewal and purification through the Spirit *only* to all who *truly* turn to God and take refuge in Him and his coming.

John understood his role was to be no more than a humble servant to God's redeeming activity in his world. Redeem means to buy back or pay off, so that you have full ownership of whatever you redeemed. God has been creating and buying back his people from others that ruled over them ever since he sent Moses to deliver them from their Egyptian captors.

**point people to Christ encourage
genuine faith
serve God's redeeming work**

We already heard that he did it again in Isaiah 43. God tells his people that they owe their origin, their character, their purpose for existence -- to him, for he has made them what they are, and he did that by redeeming them from their Egyptian captors through Moses, who led them through the waters and the hot desert wilderness and waters again to reach the promised land. For these great acts, God has a claim on them as his own people that he has named. Then he leaps to the present day, saying not only did he buy them from Egypt through the miracles of Moses -- now he was going to buy them again from Babylon. Without getting into too much history, Babylon ruled Jerusalem, but its power was fading. The Persian Empire was on the rise -- expanding westward. They were not concerned about Babylon and so had no interest Jerusalem -- except that it could become a stepping stone to expand further east -- to Egypt, Ethiopia, and Northeast Africa. This text implies that God was in essence offering Persia these three nations as payment for liberating his people from the Babylonians, and this did indeed happen. and they appointed Nehemiah as governor of the area and there was a time of great restoration and renewal of God's people.

Remember the structure we showed earlier? Why does God choose to shape and form us, redeem us, call us by name and calm us from fear by being with us? Because God has always seen us as precious, valued, honored, and deeply loved. That is why when his people couldn't stay in Eden, he continued to care for and go with them. When his people needed Egypt to deliver them from famine, he arranged for Joseph to get there ahead of time in order to save them. When Egypt changed their tune and enslaved them, he sent Moses. When they couldn't stay in the promised land, and were enslaved by the Babylonians, he sent the Persians, and leap frogging forward, now it was the Romans who were grossly abusing everyone not Roman. But this time round, it was time for a more permanent solution. This time, God's redeeming work is not geographical or political, but a

spiritual deliverance from the power of sin -- the sin that causes all the corruption and oppression in the first place.

And so, while everyone was being baptized, Jesus also came -- not needing to repent personal sins, but to publicly declare his commitment to fulfilling God's will. He came to identify with the movement of people who were sincerely seeking God. He

Purpose of Jesus' baptism Public commitment Identify with people Initiation of ministry Take on sin
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He came leaving his life in Nazareth and start his role as Messiah and when you wrap all these things together, it means that more than anything else, the sin for which everyone else was coming to repent, he was coming to take on to his life, as Paul put it in 2 Corinthians 5:21: *Christ had no sin, but God made him become sin so that in Christ we could be right with God.*(ERV)

This is the ultimate redeeming act of God. From this first day of Jesus' public ministry, he is declaring his willingness to offer himself as a sacrifice to buy us back from the power of sin and death that has so entangled and sabotaged and subjected our lives to its dark influence.

Those powers caused Isaiah at one point to cry out to God, "Oh that you would rip apart the heavens and come down" (Isaiah 64:1) and in Jesus' baptism we see God answering the sighing of the centuries. Jesus removes all barriers and paves the way for God's children to reach their eternal home.

From the parted heavens the Spirit descends, declaring that Jesus is fully equipped with the gifts and graces to fulfill his role as Messiah. This is confirmed by the voice which adds, "You are my Son", which by traditional law means the entire inheritance of everything God owns -- will belong to his Son, meaning Jesus has been granted absolute power and authority over all things. And God is well pleased to do so because his Son is taking on the ultimate work of redeeming God's people and calling them home to himself -- even now in this life.

From the beginning of the Bible to the end, the story never changes. God creates and shapes us, calls us by name, stands by us wanting to take away our fears, and moves heaven and earth and nations to bring us back to him -- all because God honors us as his precious, loved people (he is a "hopeless romantic!") And all he wants from us in return is to trust him, to genuinely repent (turn around and away) from our sins and commit ourselves to his ways and serve him as his people involved in his redeeming work. And whether he is calling us to a time of promised land-like success and prosperity -- or an exile-like time of dark suffering, when we

need to be faithful even when we don't see wonderful results; --- we can know that he will be with us through the waters and fires -- and he will be with us on our spiritual journey -- no matter what we may have done in the past -- and no matter where life may lead in the future, for he is always leading us home.

Prayer Our closing prayer in part comes from the lyrics written by GA Young. Lord, Shady green pastures, so rich and sweet, where water's cool flow bathes the weary one's feet, on the mountain where the sun shines so bright, or in the valley in the darkest of night -- when sorrows befall and Satan oppose, through grace we can conquer, defeat all our foes -- away from the mire! away from the clay - away up in glory, eternity's day -- You lead your dear children along -- some through the waters, some through the flood, some through the fire, but all through the blood, some through great sorrow, but you give a song -- in the night season and all the day long -- Lord we know that through it all -- your grace is enough for all that we will face. In Jesus name. Amen.

His grace is enough, let's sing our final song....

Music ***Your Grace is Enough***

Blessing Now go knowing that God is calling your name. Turn and follow him and never be the same. Move and live and love and grow in him, and him in you, to the glory of the Father, in the name of the Son, and in the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen.