

## **All Cry "Glory!"**

Sermon notes for the sermon  
Given by Rev. Dr. Gregory B. Young  
On Sunday, January 8, 2012

One summer, many years ago, I was on the staff of a youth camp sponsored by our United Methodist Conference. The theme for the weeklong camp was "The Life of Jesus." Each morning members of the staff were assigned to do a dramatic presentation of an event in Jesus' life. On the second morning of the camp my friend and I were asked to focus on the baptism of Jesus. Both of us had completed seminary and were serving as pastors and so we thought to ourselves, "This is going to be easy. We will have the youth attending the camp gather by the pond; one of us will play the role of John the Baptist and the other will play Jesus. We both know this story so well we won't even need to practice it ahead of time." That morning my friend said that he would be John the Baptist which meant that I was cast in the role of Jesus; the youth and staff all gathered by the side of the pond; my friend carefully waded out into the water and then I came forward as Jesus to present myself for John's baptism. Now you need to know that this pond had a lot of ducks swimming in it and the water was not clean. As my friend and I went back and forth with the dialogue of scripture (John saying that it is Jesus who should be baptizing him and Jesus insisting that all righteousness must be fulfilled) and finally it was time for the big moment for John to baptize Jesus.

We had decided ahead of time that since the water was so dirty that John would not actually dunk Jesus under water. Instead, my friend scooped the dirty water up in his cupped hands and began to pour it on my head. The first reaction of the youth was one of disgust – how gross to use that dirty water for something as special as baptism; surely that was not the way John baptized Jesus, not with dirty water! The next thing that happened caused the camp to erupt in uncontrolled laughter. My friend reached into the water a second time and said, “I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son,” and with a third handful of water, “and of the Holy Spirit.” As soon as he finished we both realized the error he had made and so there we were in the dirty, yucky pond laughing until tears ran from our eyes. John’s baptism was not in the name of the Triune God; that came later in the practice of the church as it grew and developed; in fact, there is no mention of Trinitarian baptism until the very end of the Gospel of Jesus Christ according to Matthew. (Concerning the water, Jesus was baptized in the River Jordan which I am sure was dirty and at times smelly.)

Have you ever asked yourself, “If Jesus is the Son of God, God born into our flesh and blood, then why did he have to be baptized? As God wasn’t he already pure? As God’s Son wasn’t he already part of God? Why did he have to be baptized by John?” Why couldn’t Jesus say to those that John had baptized, “Here I am’ let’s get going because I have work to do?”

The parable of the evil tenants reminds us that God sent his Son to collect that which was owed to God. Instead of paying the Son what was due the tenants killed the Son in an effort to gain that which did not belong to them. In his crucifixion, Jesus pays the debt that is owed by humanity to God and thereby satisfies that which is due to God. It seems to me that there is more to the story of salvation. It is not just about satisfying a sacrificial debt and thereby setting the things right between God and humanity. It is also about salvation; saving humanity from the influence and effects of evil and offering an eternal relationship with God. There is some of the theology that is the foundation of God's saving grace offered to all in Jesus Christ.

In practical terms what does all of this mean and how does it relate to the baptism of Jesus? I have been asking myself this question all week and I keep finding myself coming back to the images of the U.S. Coast Guard rescue swimmers. When a Coast Guard helicopter is dispatched to the scene of a sinking boat a rescue swimmer is always aboard. When the helicopter arrives on scene the crew does not just lower down a rescue harness or basket and tell the stranded people to get in. The rescue swimmer always jumps into the water, enters the chaos and fear that fills the lives of those perishing, and swims to their aid. The rescue swimmer helps those who are in crisis to find their way to safety. The swimmer ensures that each one is secure in the harness or the basket before they are lifted to the helicopter. The swimmer seeks to bring order and hope where chaos and despair are present. Some may and do refuse the help of the

rescue swimmer, preferring to take their chances with the boat and the elements; there is not time to argue, only time to save and the rescue swimmer tries to reason with those who refuse his help but ultimately it is their choice.

Jesus was baptized by John not for his sake but for the sake of those he came to save – the people gathered that day on the edge of the Jordan, you and me, humanity. Just as the Coast Guard rescue swimmer enters the reality of those stranded in an effort to save them so God, in Jesus, enters our reality and fully identifies with stranded and helpless humanity. Jesus was baptized in the River Jordan, by John, in an effort to fully identify with us and in an act that would allow us the opportunity to clearly see God at work in this life.

What is true for Coast Guard rescue swimmers can also be said about fire fighters who enter burning buildings to save lives; EMTs who enter dangerous situations to save lives; police officers who run towards danger when all of us are running for cover all in an effort to save lives; military personnel, etc. One of the primary things taught to those who enter dangerous situations in an effort to save lives is that the rescuer's safety is of utmost importance. If the rescuer is not safe then she or he may panic and lose control of the situation. If the rescuer is injured then he or she must stop saving lives and tend to injuries. In Jesus God risked everything in an effort to save humanity. God offers the best that He had to offer for our sakes. While Jesus, the Savior, the rescuer of humanity in the end was beaten, bruised, tortured and ultimately slaughtered God remained in control and the saving act in Christ was accomplished. Today, in remembering

Jesus' baptism we are called to remember that our salvation comes at a dear price. Thanks be to God.