

Water and the Spirit

**A sermon by Rev. Dr. Gregory Young
Presented on Sunday, January 10, 2010**

Sermon Prayer:

Please pray with me. Gracious God, we are thankful for your living word; the one whose birth we have celebrated recently, your son, our savior, Jesus Christ - the one who was with you from the very beginning of beginnings; the one who is with you for eternity and the one with whom we hope to spend eternity. And so this day as your word comes to dwell in our midst through the reading of scripture, the singing of hymns, through prayers and silence, and preaching, and through the gift of one another, we pray that that word will come to dwell richly in our hearts and in our lives that we will be known by those outside of this place as your holy children. This prayer I ask in the name of Jesus Christ, our savior, Amen.

Sermon:

Some preachers take Mondays as their day off in the week. I began my ministry as an associate pastor in a fairly large church in our conference, and so I was not the lead preacher and the senior pastor would take Mondays as his day off. And for six years I had Friday as my day off and I just got accustomed to that. So now I take Fridays still 30 years later as my day off and I kind of like the rhythm of the week.

The story is told of two preachers, a Baptist minister and a Methodist minister who both had Mondays off and they both went out fishing this one particular Monday. And it just so happen that each preacher had celebrated baptisms that Sunday morning in worship and so the two of them while they were fishing, just entered into a conversation about baptism. And Baptists have a very different view of baptism then do Methodists. And so finally the Methodist preacher decided I'm going to have a little fun, so he said to his Baptist brother, "Now, I realize that

when you baptize, the person that you're baptizing is dunked beneath the water, totally immersed in water." And he said, "I realize that when I baptize a baby or a child or even an adult, I just sprinkle a little water on the top of the individual's head. And I understand that you Baptists call that dry cleaning."

So he said, "I need to have clarification from you as a Baptist preacher, so I have a few questions for you. First, I'm standing knee deep in the River Jordan, am I baptized yet?" The Baptist preacher says, "No." He said, "Ok, I'm standing waist deep in River Jordan, am I baptized yet?" And the preacher said, "Absolutely not." "I said, "I'm standing up to my neck in the River Jordan, am I yet baptized?" And the Baptist preacher said, "Brother, you are not baptized." He said, "To be baptized your whole head has to go underwater." With that, the Methodist preacher said, "Well, you see, we cut out all that other stuff and we go right to the top." (Thank you for laughing, you're kind. It's those times when you tell it, you know Jeff, and nobody laughs except you. They're tough ones, they're tough. And you just move on...)

Well, today we celebrate in our worship and remember the baptism of Jesus. In Jesus both the Divine and the human meet – the Creator and the creation come together in this one person. God's presence has always been part of the physical world from the very beginning. It was God's presence that moved across the primordial waters, bringing forth order and life. God's breath was breathed into the nostrils of Adam, giving life to that first human, and it was God fashioning a woman that brought life to both man and woman. The pillar of smoke by day and the pillar of fire by night were, for the freed Israelites, the very presence of God leading them to freedom and to new life in the Promised Land. Even in the inner chamber of the Temple in Jerusalem, when Israel came to settle in the Holy Land, the very presence of God was believed to fill that inner chamber. God's presence is nothing new for the people of faith. But, God's very being, present in Jesus, the mixing of the Divine and the human in one person, is a mystery that we cannot explain to this day. How God becomes human remains a mystery to us. Even in our Nicene Creed, the terms are used very carefully; and

those terms were argued over and fought over for years until finally it was agreed that in Jesus, God was fully present; and that in Jesus humanity was fully present.

Today, we celebrate the baptism of Jesus. And in being baptized, Jesus affirms that he is indeed human and fully identifies himself with those whom John has already baptized in preparation to receive the messiah. He is part of the community that has been prepared to receive him and follow where he leads. Jesus stands with those who have turned from a life of sin and turned back to God in an effort to be prepared to be part of this messianic community; this community of faith centered around the messiah, the savior that God has sent. Jesus, by virtue of his baptism, joins this very community of faith that John had been preparing. Jesus' baptism is similar to the baptism that John was practicing as he created or as God created through him this community of faithful followers. Jesus was baptized in the River Jordan just as those who were baptized before him were baptized. It was symbolic of a ritual cleansing, a public act affirming to all a turning back to God and a centering of one's life on God and the community of hope established by that baptism.

Following Jesus' baptism, however, something unique occurred that would change the practice of baptism for this new community of faith. God's holy presence descended upon Jesus affirming him as God's beloved Son. Jesus was baptized by water and the Spirit. And those who were baptized after him were also baptized by water and the Spirit. In fact, our celebration of the sacrament of baptism, immediately following the administration of water in the name of the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit, we invoke the Holy Spirit of God to descend in a special way on the one being baptized. In Jesus both the Divine and the human meet and the sacrament of baptism affirms this meeting. We die to ourselves symbolically with the administration of the water and we rise to new life in Christ, but we remain human while finding our life and our identity through the inward working of the Holy Spirit seeking to make of us the body of Christ. Both the sacrament of baptism and the sacrament of the Lord's Supper affirm this

reality for us. In the sacraments, God and humanity meet, but it is we who are transformed by that encounter and not God. In the midst of our humanity we find the mystery of God's presence breaking in and bringing meaning, and hope and grace to our lives.

Today, as we remember Jesus' baptism we encounter the living God who seeks to make all things and all persons new. How God is present, even in our fellowship of faith remains a mystery. How we are transformed by God's presence is part of that mystery. One thing however is for certain, each time that we gather in this place in God's name and each time we believe that we as a community of faith have entered into the very presence of God here in this church.

We do not leave this place the same people we were when we entered. Something happens to each of us each time we gather in God's name and celebrate God's presence in our life together as a congregation; something that we cannot explain; something oftentimes we do not even realize happens to us that makes us different when we leave this place and go back to the business of our lives. And perhaps that is why we gather as a community in this place; that is why we come here – hoping and praying that God's love and God's grace will indeed transform us; will make us closer to what God is looking for in each and everyone of us and will make us a little bit closer as a community of faith what God is hoping for us to become as a church.

Today as we celebrate and remember Jesus' baptism, we find ourselves standing with our savior, receiving what he received and hearing the words of blessing that were spoken by God to him and continue to be spoken by God to us, "You are my beloved children."

Amen.