

## BAPTISM REBOOT

Pentecost 8-B

July 15, 2018

Mark 1:1-11

Those of you who follow the Revised Common Lectionary closely will notice that the gospel read this morning is a departure from the appointed Mark 6 text. That reading notes Herod's fear that, in Jesus, John the Baptist has returned; and Mark devotes sixteen verses to graphically describe John's demise.

The reason for the change is that we will be celebrating a baptism [for Caroline at 10:30 today], and that occasion has brought a family together at The Outer Banks to witness the event. Caroline will be baptized by her great-aunt, the Rev. Connie Jones, Associate Rector at Grace Episcopal Church in Yorktown, VA.

Such an occasion deserves a more uplifting reading, and is worthy of the retelling of Jesus' baptism by John from the very beginning of Mark's gospel. Collectively it is a pasting together of the gospel texts from the Second Sunday in Advent and The Baptism of Our Lord, which also happens to be most of the reading for the commemoration of St. Mark.

John the Baptist was quite a character. The last of the Old Testament generation of prophets, John had the unique task of announcing the coming of Jesus, who came to fulfill the law as God Incarnate; that is, God came to us as one of us to live among us. Little wonder that Mark calls *this account* "The beginning of the good news...." And let us not forget that Jesus called John the greatest of the prophets.

John was not the first to use the act of washing as a way of helping believers repent: which means to do an "about-face" or turn around. But he is remembered because he practiced baptism, and because Jesus came to him to be baptized. In today's language it might have been called a "reboot" because Baptism was all about resetting one's life and making a fresh start.

That meaning is not lost on us today, either. We call Holy Baptism "new birth" and "new life." The common theology for Episcopalians and Lutherans tells us that the old sinful self is put to death. That promise comes in the words about the power of water as a sign; and because of that sign—that sacrament—that holy action of *setting us apart* we are buried with Jesus in his death, and together we share in the joy of the resurrection. We receive the promise of the Holy Spirit to remind us of our rebirth as the Spirit accompanies us in our faith and life's journey.

Other evangelists' retelling of the story reports that, when Jesus approached John, asking to be baptized, John protested: "I should be baptized by you." But John did as Jesus asked. And in that action, Jesus gave greater meaning to the rite: because in the water of baptism, Jesus joined himself to all the baptized in every time and every place. I like to think of it this way: Water cleanses, touches our bodies, quenches our thirst, becomes rain for our crops, and ultimately evaporates to go back into the atmosphere to shower on us and fill our lakes and oceans another day. Yes, we are connected by water in a rather tangible way.

Some faith traditions refer to the Sacrament of Holy Baptism as "christening." I had a theology professor who hated that term because it had been misappropriated by common culture. "We christen ships and vessels and other inanimate objects," he lamented.

And, while Lutherans rarely use the term "christening," *this Lutheran* finds redemption in that word because it speaks of our Lord's claim on us. In baptism we are given a new name, Christ's name. The newly baptized is initiated or received [as Caroline will be welcomed today] as a member of

Christ's Church. We say that the one who has been baptized is a *Christian*. There is one Lord, one faith, one baptism. So, it is an identity that crosses denominational lines, and a promise that we never lose. This is what *our churches* believe and profess.

I was in Roanoke at a conference this past week, an annual event called *Power in the Spirit*. Appropriately, this year's theme was "Walking in Newness of Life." In other words, it spoke about how we live into the baptismal covenant that God made with us. A lot of that centers of remembering, first and foremost that God in Christ chose us has called us his own. We recall the words of the prophet Isaiah: "Do not be afraid, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine." [Isaiah 43:1]

The sign of the cross is made on our foreheads: an anointing with oil, accompanied by the words: "You are sealed by the Holy Spirit in Baptism and marked as Christ's own forever." (In the Lutheran rite we proclaim "... [you] are marked with the cross of Christ forever.") Whenever the sign of the cross is made over you; or whenever you made the sign of the cross, on your forehead, or across your head and chest, you are being reminded of your baptism. Martin Luther urged his hearers and readers that, when they are facing temptation, to make the sign of the cross and announce: "I am baptized."

By remembering, regularly, that we belong to Christ, we think and speak and act as children of God. And we call on God to help us remain faithful to our calling in the midst of all that this world throws at us.

At the conference, one of the participants talked about a conversation she had with her 7 year-old son concerning baptism. He announced to her: "There is a cross on my forehead; and you can't see it, but it's always there."

And that is the promise we will make to Caroline today, and we will—in "The Baptismal Covenant"—remember our baptism and re-commit ourselves to *our calling* and *our being called* Christ's own forever. So together, let's hit the "reset" button and see how God will use us in this new phase of our baptismal journey. Amen.