

East Hartford  
1 ord, Bapt of Christ 1/12/2014

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Isaiah 42: 1-9, Psa 29, Matt 3:3-17

## Remember Your Baptism!

Remember your baptism. How many of us remember our baptism??

When taken as "remember the day or the occasion of our baptism", I suspect those among us who were born into the traditions which routinely practice infant baptism, Catholics, Lutheran, UCC, Congregationalist, Methodists, cannot recall the occasion of our baptisms. Those "born into" those traditions which only practice "believer's baptism" may have vivid memories of their baptismal day, Baptists, Pentecostal traditions, some of the megachurches across the country.

Now since we will baptize infants and believers, I do hope that Delilah Ortiz will remember the occasion of her baptism with thanksgiving and joy for the next 8 or 9 decades at least. For those who are curious, yes, I do remember the occasion of my baptism, and I am the misfit oddball. I am a daughter of the Congregational/ now UCC tradition, but my parents never had me baptized as an infant or a child. It would be May of my junior year of college, during my sojourn with the evangelical Baptists, that I was baptized in a river in North Leverett, Mass. I have vivid memories of the occasion and very cold spring river water. I want every possible "brownie point" that can be credited to my account!

The church calendar designates today as the Baptism of Christ Sunday, when, every year we remember the story of Jesus' baptism as given to us by the various gospel writers. While Matthew, Mark and Luke are essentially in agreement, Matthew and only Matthew speaks of the argument between Jesus and his cousin, John the Baptist which gives us the opportunity to ask, "Why do we baptize?"

You remember how that Matthew presents that little exchange. *At that time Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan River so that John would baptize him. 14 John tried to stop him and said, "I need*

*to be baptized by you, yet you come to me?"*

*15 Jesus answered, "Allow me to be baptized now. This is necessary to fulfill all righteousness."*

*So John agreed. CEB*

Scholars have spent a couple of millenia debating what exactly is meant by, *This is necessary to fulfill all righteousness.*" with no real resolution in sight. Suffice it to say that Jesus' baptism becomes the beginning of his ministry, therefore, we as disciples of Christ, whether as parents, bringing children for baptism, or as believers seeking baptism do so as a walking in the way, as following of the example of Christ.

We follow Jesus' example, not as copycat, but as heartfelt consecration unto God -- of ourselves, and/ or of our children. One scholar put it this way: "The Church does not dispense the sacrament of baptism in order to acquire for herself an increase in membership but in order to consecrate a human being to God and to communicate to that person the divine gift of birth from God." (Hans Urs von Balthasar, 20th century) We begin our ministries, knowing that our self consecration into God is the first step of a lifelong journey, it is our first "yes" to the invitation of Jesus to follow in his way of love, and walk in his path.

Baptism is the beginning of a new identity. All four gospels, each in their own way, speak of the Spirit's appearance, *"like a dove"* at the moment of baptism. The three synoptics speak of the heavenly voice saying, *"This is my Son, the Beloved,[a] with whom I am well pleased."* At the risk of speaking heresy, I believe this is the reason that story of baptism is followed immediately by the story of Jesus' journey into the wilderness, the wilderness of the desert, and the wilderness of discovery of this new (to him) identity - what does it mean to be God's beloved child?

It will be just a few short weeks down the calendar when the church will once again lead us into the wilderness of Lent, that time when we get seriously intentional about what it means for us to discover

what it means for each of us to live our baptismal identity as God's beloved child. More about that in the Sundays following Ash Wednesday. For today it is enough to say that in our baptism, we begin that life long journey of consecration into God, God's love, God's call to love, that we become God's beloved child, in whom God delights and is well pleased.

That is a somewhat lengthy, somewhat perhaps convoluted, theological understanding of baptism. I want to take us back to the sermon title, "Remember Your Baptism" rpt.

Please note that the sermon title is a statement, perhaps a directive, certainly a suggestion. Remember Your Baptism is *not*, I repeat *not* a question. For all of my introductory remarks, I am not inquiring about your memory. I am calling upon us to Remember Our Baptism. I call upon us to remember our baptism as a way of becoming, claiming our identity, strengthening us in the certainty of who and whose we are.

Let's try it this way. Repeat after me. I am xxxx, God's beloved child xxxxxxxxxxxx in whom God delights xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx . Try it again as one sentence: I am God's beloved child, in whom God delights. xxxxxxxxxxxxxx.

Now that's all very nice in church, but what good does it do us in the rest of the week. At the ratio of 1 to 167, one hour here, 167 hours working, playing, sleeping, commuting and more til we're back here. At the ratio of 1 to 167, what good does that little sentence make in the rest of the week.

Let's try on some of our experience.

How many of us have times when we are sorry. Perhaps we get angry, lose our temper? Ever done that? Ever had a time when the mouth was in motion before the brain was in gear? How many of us have regretted something we said or did? Perhaps we hurt some one else, or offended someone, or failed to say or do the right thing - we did not seek

forgiveness, or make the apology or neglected to say, “I love you,” failed to say, “Thank you.” We did not offer forgiveness to another. How many of us have times when we are sorry.

Imagine, what might happen if in the times when we are sorry, we were to remember our baptism. Might we, in the midst of acknowledging, “I am God’s beloved child in whom God is delighted,” might we then come to our rightful minds, and apologize or offer forgiveness? Might we, standing in the awareness I that “I am God’s beloved” find the where with all to say, “I love you.”

How many of us have times when we are scared - scared to try something new, scared to make a mistake? Scared to do something bold - join a protest, advocate for another, stand up to the powers that be?

What if in the middle of being scared, in the middle of being terrified, we took a moment to remember our baptism? Yes. I am scared. AND Yes. I am God’s beloved. You see we are not either or - I am scared and I am God’s beloved. I am God’s beloved and I can take the next step towards whatever I fear.

One last example. How many of us have times when we are stretched, Stretched beyond what we have done before. Stretched beyond what we think we can accomplish. Stretched beyond what we can give or forgive. Stretched beyond what we can imagine or hope? Or knowing what to say?

You know my next question. What if in the midst of being stretched, we were to remember our baptism? What if in the middle of the temptation, “I can not ....” we were to claim our God given identity; if we were to say even out loud, “I am God’s beloved, in whom God delights.”

Friends, do it. Remember Your Baptism. Claim your very identity as God’s beloved, as one who brings joy to God, as one in whom is utterly delighted. Do it when you are stretched, when you are scared, when you

are sorry - and when life is good and you are rejoicing in God just as God rejoices in you.

Do it. Remember Your Baptism.