

WESTMINSTER
PRESBYTERIAN
CHURCH



SERMON

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Waters of Grace

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Matthew 3:13–17

Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to be baptized by John. But John tried to deter him, saying, “I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?” Jesus replied, “Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness.” Then John consented. As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, “This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.”

A question for you today, one that you have heard before. “What’s in your wallet?” That is the take-away line for a credit card company that wants their card to be front and center in your wallet. Beyond the advertising pitch. It’s a good philosophical question. “What IS in your wallet or on your smart phone that reflects who you are, where you are, and where you are headed in your journey of life? To name a few examples:

If you have credit cards (you are a consumer).

If you have business cards (you are an employee).

If you have a library card (you are a reader).

If you have health insurance cards (you are responsible and protecting your family).

If you have gym cards (you are fit or have good intensions).

And don't forget all those required "photo-id" cards — driver's license, employee id, voter ID all the cards that make you "legitimate" and a citizen "in good standing," a "leader in your community." Does all that "card counting" really make up your identity? Today as we consider baptism, we witness another identity being given that surpasses all others- at baptism, you are given an identity **follower of Jesus**. Being a disciple is an identity. The bigger question seem to be, what does baptism mean for our daily living?

Rev. Sarah Jo Sarchet, a Presbyterian minister in Chicago, Illinois tells of a ten-year-old boy in her congregation named Cameron, who walked into her office and said he needed to talk to her. Fresh from soccer practice, and wearing his Cincinnati Reds baseball cap, he had a request for her. "I'd like to be baptized," he said. "We were learning about Jesus' baptism in Sunday School. The teacher had asked the class who had been baptized. All the other kids raised their hands. So, Cameron said, "I want to be baptized too." Using her best pastoral care tone of voice, she said, "Cameron, do you really want to be baptized because everyone else is?" His freckles winked up at her and he replied, "No. I want to be baptized because it means I belong to God."

She was touched by his understanding. “Well,” she said, “How about this Sunday?” His smile turned to concern, “Do I have to be baptized in front of all those people in the church? Can’t I just have a friend baptize me in the river?” She asked where he came up with that idea. “Well, Jesus was baptized by his cousin John in a river, wasn’t he?” Caught off guard, she conceded, “You have a point. But, if a friend baptized you in the river, how would the church recognize it?” Realizing this was a teachable moment, she climbed up on her foot stool to reach for her **Presbyterian Book of Order** that was located on the highest shelf. But before she placed her hand on the book, he responded. “I guess by my new way of living” he said. She nearly fell off the foot stool and left the Book of Order on the shelf. Cameron’s understanding was neither childish nor simple. It was profound. Baptism calls us to a new way of living. (From a sermon by Sarah Jo Sarchet – Fourth Presbyterian Chicago).

In baptism everything changes. Jesus’ baptism at John’s hands becomes a moment of divine revelation. As Jesus comes to the water, he is seen by his peers as fully human. As Jesus comes out of the water he is seen by his peers as fully human and as fully divine confirmed when the heavens

open and the voice affirms, **He is the Beloved**. Jesus' baptismal moment is when his authentic humanity and revealed divinity come together. His one identity as human and divine is forever sealed in this moment through the waters of grace. In baptism we too are sealed by the Holy spirit and marked as Christ's own forever.

Jesus is God but he accepted our human frailty. Jesus loves all of us and turns our frailty into healing streams of love, mercy, and strength. Jesus is our Vision. We don't need to come up with our own "vision" of how to live when we have Jesus as our "vision." Our ministry, our mission, is to be committed "followers" of Christ wherever that takes us. In the words of Thomas Merton: "Every baptism implies a distinct individual vocation...We are not called merely to vegetate in the Mystical Body, but to act and to grow and to help the growth of other members"

When I was 14, I was baptized here at Westminster Church. My thoughts were not as insightful as Cameron about the meaning of baptism. I was baptized because I was being confirmed and my parents had been Baptist when I was born. That meant I was dedicated as a baby, to be baptized as an adult when I would make my own statement of faith. In the Chapel sat my confirmation class along with our parents.

I still remember Hetz Marsh calling me up front. Standing at the baptismal font, the heavens did not open, but the water/ the words of baptism in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit moved me. The promise of God's grace that I was baptized, and beloved has stayed with me always.

We grow into our baptisms which is good, for to receive the entire gift at one time would be too much. The foundation of who we are and whose we are, is given at baptism as we start living into our identity. No one lingers at the water; Jesus was driven from the River Jordan. I stepped away from the font. We begin to live as disciples. From this congregation I was nurtured with love, patience, and instruction, then sent out from the walls of Westminster. I served in mission in Ecuador when I was in high school, I attended a Christian college and later seminary with your blessing. Ordained in this sanctuary, I have served five churches including the great honor of being installed as your pastor where we have learned together, prayed, come to the font, met at bedsides and graveyards in the service of the Lord. Now the waters of my baptism flow in a new direction for me to the Presbytery.

This is the weekend we commemorate the life of Martin Luther King Jr, **a social activist and Baptist minister** who

played a key role in the American civil rights movement. He championed the application of the gospel to political and social reform. He championed a called of service to others. Martin Luther King Jr. said “**Everybody can be great because everybody can serve**. You don’t have to have a college degree to serve. You don’t have to make your subject and your verb agree to serve. You only need a heart full of grace, a soul generated by love.”

We will now be on different paths in our service but always unified in our devotion to love God and neighbor. I look forward to hearing the wonderful ways the Spirit will be working in and through you here at Westminster Church and in service to the world beyond, for you, each of you are children of God, the Beloved.



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