

“New People”

The Baptism of Our Lord

Jan. 11, 2015

Genesis 1:1-5; Romans 6:1-11; Mark 1:4-11

Brothers and Sisters in Christ, through Baptism, we have been declared by God to be new people! Even though we Christians still war each and every day against sin; against the power of the devil; against death itself, Christ has declared that we really are new people because of him. His death and subsequent resurrection have become, through baptism, our guarantee that just as Jesus was raised from the dead, so also will we be raised from the dead. Paul explains this so well in our Epistle reading doesn't he? “Do you not know, he says, that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life (6:3-4). What this means is that the power of sin has been broken. At our baptisms, our old selves were crucified and put to death with Christ. This should mean that in each of our lives we should be growing in spiritual maturity, conforming more and more to God's law in our thoughts and deeds and giving in less to the power of sin.

Oh, how I wish it were that simple. We, those baptized into his death and resurrection must consider ourselves alive to God in Christ Jesus. And that truth should “rule the day” no matter what. It sure sounds good. It sure sounds like a shift in thinking that we all need because it shifts the negative of sin and death to the positive of life and life eternal. It shifts the doom and gloom of the mess of this world to the joy that we are new creations; new people in Christ. But so much of the time, this is not us, is it?

Think back to that most wonderful day you were baptized. Think back to how you felt the day God claimed you as his own. Oh wait, for most of us that's not going to happen is it? Most of us (not all) but most of us can't think back to that most wonderful

day. We can only think back to that most wonderful date we were baptized as babies or young children. And if we don't know or remember the specific date, we have parents and/or God-parents that can vouch that the event happened. But even though as Paul reminds us that in our baptisms we “must consider ourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus, if we are brutally honest with ourselves, we have a hard time giving so much power to a few words joined with some water on some random day, don't we?

Why? Because this simple act on its own doesn't make much sense because there is nothing to experience or for that matter even remember. How many babies, children, or even adults have come to be baptized at this font and nothing out the ordinary or even that memorable happened. Sure, there have been a few tears or a few times when things didn't go as planned but for the most part it has all seemed routine and uneventful, right? But even though we might not see it or witness some dramatic change in the person, so much happened the day you and I were baptized. We just have to get to the point in our lives of faith that we are open to the work of God not just in our physical experiences but most importantly in our hearts. We are new people. And to really understand this, I think we have to start at the beginning.

That's just where our Old Testament reading starts this day. It starts at the beginning of the Bible. There was darkness and void and God said, “let there be light and there was light.” There is was. Before God spoke, there was no light. It was dark and cold but God's Word changed everything. And God continued creating in the same way. He called something into being and it came. The land, the sky, trees, birds, fish, animals. God spoke and there is was. But then we know what happened don't we? The evil one, Satan himself tried his best to destroy what God did. He was able to mess things up to a certain extent wasn't he? He managed to twist God's perfection into something that matched him a little better didn't he? The worst was that all life would now experience death.

What has happened to God's creation is so sad. What has happened to us, his once perfect people is so sad. Look at what we have become. We are selfish, mean, greedy, back-stabbing, sinful people who forget about God more than we remember him so much of the time.

But then something so miraculous and wonderful happened. Jesus came to be baptized in the Jordan. Why do we celebrate this day, the day that Jesus was baptized? The same reason, we celebrate each and everyone of our baptisms. Today, we remember that our loving God has not left the world that we messed up to decay. He has not left you or me to die and that death be the end. By Jesus' baptism, he is opening the heavens for all of us, which makes us new people.

The truth is Jesus wasn't baptized for himself. He certainly didn't need to be new, did he? But Jesus knew that we did. Just like Jesus didn't die on the cross for the sins he committed. He in no way needed to suffer punishment for the things he had done. But Jesus knew that we did. And Jesus didn't rise from the dead just because he could or for his own sake. He rose from the dead so that we could also rise from the dead.

So today, we remember not just Jesus' baptism but we remember and celebrate that we have been united with him through our own baptisms. With the water and his words that he has spoken to us, "I baptize you in the name of Father and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, he has made us new people. It might not feel that way sometimes but remember, just like with creation, God spoke and it was.

We might not remember our baptisms but we don't have to because we have faith not in our experiences but in God's Word. It is his word that creates!

In closing, I want to share something with you that I ran across in one of my files as I was preparing for this sermon. I have this big file appropriately labeled "baptism" where I keep various baptism requests, copies of pertinent articles and the like. I was flipping through that file and came across a piece of paper where I had written a few

words. These are not my words but obviously ones that grabbed my attention from somewhere. Here's what I wrote: "God buries sinners in Christ's tomb, the only place in his universe where he no longer looks. Then he raises up these sinners to new life as his children." Whoever wrote this has great wisdom because this is what being "new people" in our baptisms is all about. We will still have those doubts that creep into our minds and toy with us whether or not all this stuff is true. Some of us will still experience illnesses so bad that we have to take 20 plus pills a day just to function. Some of us will not be able to pay our bills or buy things for our families. Some of us will even experience the sting of an earthy death. But during those times and even the times when everything is ok, we turn to the truth of who we are as God's children made new in the waters of Holy Baptism.

God has not and will not abandon us. He has not and will not forget the pains we have. He has called us to be a new people in him. And we are. We are because our old selves were crucified and put to death with Christ and through our faith in Christ, we will live even though we die. Amen.