

“80’s TV: I – FAMILY TIES”
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Baptism of the Lord

Matthew 3:13-17

I begin today with a confession. Along about the first of November every year, I get really irritated with the Hallmark Channel on TV. And you want to know why? They start running around the clock Christmas movies – for two solid months! Now I like a good Christmas movie as well as the next person, but they take all their normal shows off to run them – which includes, yes, you guessed it, “I Love Lucy!”

I love “I Love Lucy” – always have, always will. And she’s on first thing in the morning on the Hallmark Channel, so as soon as my alarm goes off, Lucy goes on. It’s a great way to wake up!

I love those old TV shows, and I love looking back and watching some of those good old family shows of yesteryear – shows like “Andy Griffith,” “Leave It to Beaver” early on, and then shows from the 80’s like “Family Ties,” “Full House,” and yes, even some of those dysfunctional families, like “Dallas” and “Dynasty.”

It seems that there are always good story lines when it comes to families. The Bible is evidence of that. Family drama through and through. And though you may not have caught it at first glance, this morning’s Gospel lesson is a family story. At first glance, it simply looked like a story about Jesus’ baptism. So let’s take a look at it this morning.

You probably know the story. John the Baptist was baptizing people in the River Jordan and Jesus came up to him and asked to be baptized. At first, John didn’t want to do it. It didn’t make sense. If anything, John thought, it should be Jesus baptizing him, not the other way around. But Jesus convinced him that it was meant to be – and so John consented.

He helped Jesus under the water, and the scripture says that when Jesus came up out of the water after being baptized, the heavens opened up and the Spirit of God descended like a dove and he heard a voice from heaven say, “This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased.”

It was an incredibly important moment in Jesus’ life for so many reasons. It was a moment of affirmation – “This is my Son. This is my Son the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased.” Not only must Jesus’ heart have been touched to hear that, but if there was anyone around who doubted who Jesus was, now there was no doubt, for a voice from heaven had said it plainly and clearly for all to hear – “This is my Son.”

This moment also marked the start of Jesus’ ministry. It was the moment he was commissioned, if you will, for his work on earth. From that point on, he would go forth in

ministry, empowered by the Holy Spirit. He would go from there into the wilderness of temptation for forty days, after which he went into ministry for the next three years. It was his moment of commissioning to do the will of God who had sent him.

But besides being a moment of affirmation and a moment of commissioning, Jesus' baptism was so much more. It was the beginning of a great family story, if you will. Because from that moment on, whenever anyone was baptized, he or she became a part of Christ's family, the Christian family – and still does to this day. Through our baptism, we are united with him and with one another.

And just as, after he was baptized, Jesus knew some things for sure, so too do we. So I want to share a few of those things with you for the next few minutes.

First, we know that we are sinners saved by grace. We are under no illusion that we are perfect people. No, as a matter of fact, we acknowledge who we are and how we fall short of who we should be. And we acknowledge that there is evil in the world, and on our own, we are vulnerable to it.

Do you remember the vows that are made at baptism, actually the questions that are asked?

Here they are: “Do you renounce the spiritual forces of wickedness, reject the evil powers of this world and repent of your sin? Do you accept the freedom and power God gives you to resist evil, injustice, and oppression in whatever forms they present themselves? Do you confess Jesus Christ as your Savior, put your whole trust in his grace, and promise to serve him as your Lord, in union with the church which Christ has opened to people of all ages, nations, and races?”

Those are the questions we ask, and the questions to which we say “I do.” We come to the waters of baptism knowing that we are sinners in need of grace, and through the waters of baptism, we are cleansed, made whole, set free, empowered to live in the midst of a world of temptation and evil, empowered by the Holy Spirit. Through baptism, we are sinners saved by the amazing grace of God.

Secondly, through baptism, we know that we are called to something special in life – just as Jesus was called. We are called to be his disciples, to be his hands and feet in the world, to share his love with the world, to speak up for those who have no voice, to care for those who are vulnerable, to care more about others than we do for ourselves, to share the good news of the Gospel with a hurting, cynical world.

We come up out of the waters of baptism different people – different from people who live only for themselves. We come up out of the waters of baptism to live for the Lord – that is our calling as members of his family.

A third thing that we know for sure because of our baptism, is that we have each other. We are brothers and sisters in Christ – family – together. We are one body in Christ, one fellowship, one family. And that is amazing, isn't it? Bishop William Willimon once said, “The church's unity is a gift – not an achievement. For who could explain how so diverse a people as we could come together, except that our togetherness

is grace?" (William Willimon, *Remember Who You Are: Baptism as a Model for Christian Life*, p. 64)

Who indeed? Just look at us here in this church – we are certainly a diverse group – all ages, different backgrounds, different jobs, different opinions (yes!), yet still we are one in Christ, and we are family. You know, this week I was looking over the next set of greeting videos that you'll see over the next sixteen weeks and over and over again, that theme kept coming up – the warmth, caring and belonging of this church family – it's what makes us special. Over and over again, people said that from the first moment they came in here they felt it – family, caring, warmth. Where does that come from? Where does that start? Friends, it starts in the waters of baptism, in our unity in Christ, in grace.

Because of baptism, we have each other.

Just a couple more things we know for sure because of our baptism. This one is really, really important. We know, because of our baptism, somewhere deep down in our hearts, that like Jesus, we too are beloved, we are God's beloved sons and daughters. And that's something we lean on in the midst of a world that tries to tell us otherwise.

Pastor David Lose put it this way, "We live in a culture that promises acceptance only if we are – skinny enough, strong enough, successful enough, rich enough, popular enough, beautiful enough, young enough, and so on. Which means that the message of baptism that God has declared that we are enough, that God accepts us just as we are, and that God desires to do wonderful things for and through us is what we desperately need to hear." (On-line, "Baptismal Problems and Promises," David Lose, 1/5/14)

So hear that friends. Remember that! You are beloved, just as you are. God loves you, just as you are. You don't have to prove yourself to anybody, for you are a beloved child of God, saved by grace. That's something we know because we are baptized.

And finally, one other thing we know because of our baptism, is that we always have hope – always – because the Jesus who rose up out of the waters of baptism, also rose up from death – and so shall we. So we have no need to ultimately fear anything. We are a people of hope, for through the waters of baptism we die with Christ and rise with him as well. We are a people of hope, we always have hope.

So let me finish today with an invitation to you by way of two brief stories. I'm sure many of you either read Alex Haley's book *Roots* or saw the TV series many years ago based on that book. Talk about a family story! Well, there is a memorable scene in that story where one night the slave Kunta Kinte has to drive his master to a ball at a big plantation house. He drops his master off and then goes and parks the buggy down the lane. He can hear the music coming from the white people's ball inside.

But then, after a little while, he begins to hear some other music coming from down the lane, from the little cabins behind the master's house. It is different music, music with a different rhythm. Suddenly, Kunta Kinte feels his legs taking him down that lane, in search of the music. There he finds a man playing African music, his music

which he remembered hearing in Africa as a child – the music he has almost forgotten. He talks to the man and shares stories and memories with him.

As the man who retold this story wrote, “That night, after returning from the dance, Kunta Kinte went home changed. He lay upon the dirt floor of his little cabin and wept, weeping in sadness that he had almost forgotten, weeping in joy that he had at last remembered. The terrifying, degrading experience of slavery had almost obliterated his memory of who he was. But the music had helped him remember. How easy it is, in the midst of this life, to forget who you are and whose you are.” (Willimon, *ibid.*)

Indeed, how easy it is. The music helped Kunta Kinte remember, the waters of baptism help us remember.

Which leads me to my final short story. It’s actually a rather personal one for me, because it involves one of my very favorite seminary professors, Larry Stookey. He was my preaching and worship professor, and a wonderful man, who died, not long ago after suffering from a debilitating disease. Larry wrote one of the definitive books on baptism, that United Methodists still hold dear to this day. And in that book he wrote these words:

“Martin Luther was correct. When it is properly understood, there is no greater comfort on earth than this – that I am baptized. Because of that (Larry continued), I find an assurance even in ordinary water, and that sometimes under the most unlikely of circumstances – when I am bailing out my basement after a hurricane or howling because I have turned on the wrong faucet in a shower stall. Even then, the water is a sign of the destructive, creative, saving power of God. Dashing across the quadrangle in the rain at the seminary where I teach, I sometimes shout to a drenched student, ‘Remember your baptism, and be thankful!’ Those who don’t know me will take it as a bad joke. The rest know better.” (Larry Stookey, *Baptism: God’s Act in the Church*, p. 181)

So friends, my invitation to you today is “remember your baptism – always.” Remember that you are a sinner saved by grace. Remember that you are called to service in Christ and for Christ. Remember that you are a part of God’s great big, wonderful family, including your brothers and sisters in Christ right here in this church. Remember that you are a beloved child of God. Remember that you always have hope. Remember your baptism – always.

So over the next few days, I hope you’ll do that whenever you’re around water. When you’re washing your hands or making your coffee; when you’re bathing your child or doing your laundry; when you’re taking a walk by the lake or get caught in a rain shower – whenever you’re around water, remember your baptism, and be thankful!

Amen.