

## **Baptized with the Holy Spirit**

**Rev. Jessie Squires**

**January 10, 2010, Baptism of the Lord Sunday**

**Let us stand for the reading of the gospel:**

**Scripture: Luke 3: 15-17, 21-22**

**<sup>15</sup>The people were waiting expectantly and were all wondering in their hearts if John might possibly be the Christ. <sup>[a]</sup> <sup>16</sup>John answered them all, "I baptize you with <sup>[b]</sup> water.**

**But one more powerful than I will come, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. <sup>17</sup>His winnowing fork is in his hand to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his barn, but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire."**

**<sup>21</sup>When all the people were being baptized, Jesus was baptized too. And as he was praying, heaven was opened <sup>22</sup>and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased."**

**This is the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.**

**Thanks be to God**

**You may be seated...**

**Let us pray: Lord open our hearts and mind to receive you Holy Spirit today and have a deeper meaning of our baptism. Amen.**

This past week I was in New Orleans at the Congress on Evangelism. This congress focused on the revitalization of The United Methodist church through effective evangelism. There I ate a lot of amazing food like alligator and red beans and rice, and heard many speakers such as Pastors Jim Walker, Rudy Rasmus, and Bishop Will Willoman. All of these speakers had one thing in common...passion.

- About telling people who Jesus was
- About making Christ real to people
- About making disciples of all nations for the transformation of the world

In our Scripture for today John the Baptist had this passion.

- Forerunner of Jesus who was preparing the way for the promised one
- He was part of the revelation of Jesus. Just as last Sunday was Epiphany Sunday today we learn about the further revelation of Jesus Christ through his baptism.

A couple weeks ago we talked about John's baptism of repentance:

- Remember he tried to get people to be baptized by comparing them to reptiles and telling them to flee from the wrath to come
- In order to gain forgiveness from God the people had to repent of their sins and be baptized with water

Today John speaks of a new baptism: He says, "I baptize you with water but the one more powerful than I... will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire."

Today we learn of the importance of baptism because Jesus himself was baptized.

- Sacrament in the Church today because it was ordained by Christ.

Jesus Christ leads the way for us through baptism with water and the Holy Spirit.

Why do we use water in baptism?

- Theology Commissioning interview
  - What is an example of baptism in the Old Testament?

Throughout the Old Testament God uses water to reveal Godself.

- In Genesis we see the Holy Spirit hovering over the water
  - The flood where God used water to create a new people
- In Exodus God used water to save the people of Israel from the Egyptians
- After the Israelites crossed the Jordan River they received the promise of Abraham's descendants<sup>1</sup>

In the Old Testament we see water as a cleansing agent, the revelation of God, and a source of new life.

The Old Testament also captures the meaning behind baptism through God's covenant with the Israelites.<sup>2</sup>

- God first made a covenant with Adam: do not eat from the tree of knowledge of good and evil (Genesis 2:17)
- Noah: never again will God destroy all life by water (Gen. 9: 8-17)
- Covenant with Abraham, covenant marked by circumcision
- Moses and the 10 Commandments, the law, and the levitical priesthood
- Covenant with David
- the promise of a new covenant to be fulfilled by the promised one

All of these covenants in the Old Testament show how God first steps out to be in relationship with us and it is up to us to respond to God's grace.

This is why we need a baptism of water and the Holy Spirit.

It is by the Holy Spirit, that we are able to step out in faith and respond to God's covenant through the sign act of baptism.

What does it mean that we are baptized with the Holy Spirit?

- Our Scripture for the today is the first time we see the Holy Spirit in baptism

Jesus waited in the same line as other sinners to be baptized by John.

- After Jesus was baptized, he was praying and the Holy Spirit descended upon him like a dove

When the Holy Spirit descended on Jesus, it was then that we knew his true identity

- Jesus Christ as Lord
- Jesus Christ as the Son of God

God said, "You are the Son, the Beloved, with you I am well pleased."

Jesus leads the way for us to have a relationship with God and this is made possible by the Holy Spirit

We are not Baptist, as United Methodist we believe that it is our faith in Jesus Christ that saves us. So why be baptized? If all we need to be saved is faith then why go through the Sacrament of Baptism?

We are baptized because we follow the example of Jesus in the Bible

- We are baptized because we make a public statement of our faith to the community of faith who will help nurture us
- We are baptized with water and the Holy Spirit so we can continue to have strength for the rest of our Christian journey
- Baptism is an outward sign of the inward faith we have in Jesus Christ and is a way that God offers us the means of grace

We are baptized because we want to be filled with the Holy Spirit...

Story about mask in New Orleans

- Wanted to take a piece of New Orleans home with me

In New Orleans they celebrate Mardi Gras each year which starts before the first day a lent, a time of repentance for the Christian Church<sup>3</sup>

You may be surprised to learn that the Roman Catholic Church legitimized this holiday to be a brief celebration before the penitential season of Lent

- There is a street procession and people wear masks and ride on horse drawn carriages
- I chose this mask because it is a beautiful illustration of what baptism means.

(Move down to Baptismal Font with Megan and put on mask)

*Please Hear What I'm Not Saying* by Charles Finn, 1966 (Read back and forth between Jessie Squires and Megan Saucier)

Please Hear What I'm Not Saying

Don't be fooled by me.  
 Don't be fooled by the face I wear  
 for I wear a mask, a thousand masks,  
 masks that I'm afraid to take off,  
 and none of them is me.

Pretending is an art that's second nature with me,  
 but don't be fooled,  
 for God's sake don't be fooled.  
 I give you the impression that I'm secure,  
 that all is sunny and unruffled with me, within as well  
 as without,  
 that confidence is my name and coolness my game,  
 that the water's calm and I'm in command  
 and that I need no one,  
 but don't believe me.

My surface may seem smooth but my surface is my mask,  
 ever-varying and ever-concealing.  
 Beneath lies no complacency.  
 Beneath lies confusion, and fear, and aloneness.  
 But I hide this. I don't want anybody to know it.  
 I panic at the thought of my weakness exposed.  
 That's why I frantically create a mask to hide behind,  
 a nonchalant sophisticated facade,  
 to help me pretend,

to shield me from the glance that knows.

But such a glance is precisely my salvation, my only hope,  
and I know it.

That is, if it's followed by acceptance,  
if it's followed by love.

It's the only thing that can liberate me from myself,  
from my own self-built prison walls,  
from the barriers I so painstakingly erect.

It's the only thing that will assure me  
of what I can't assure myself,  
that I'm really worth something.

But I don't tell you this. I don't dare to, I'm afraid to.

I'm afraid your glance will not be followed by acceptance,  
will not be followed by love.

I'm afraid you'll think less of me,  
that you'll laugh, and your laugh would kill me.

I'm afraid that deep-down I'm nothing  
and that you will see this and reject me.

So I play my game, my desperate pretending game,  
with a facade of assurance without  
and a trembling child within.

So begins the glittering but empty parade of masks,  
and my life becomes a front.

I idly chatter to you in the suave tones of surface talk.

I tell you everything that's really nothing,  
and nothing of what's everything,  
of what's crying within me.

So when I'm going through my routine  
do not be fooled by what I'm saying.

Please listen carefully and try to hear what I'm not saying,  
what I'd like to be able to say,  
what for survival I need to say,  
but what I can't say.

I don't like hiding.

I don't like playing superficial phony games.

I want to stop playing them.

I want to be genuine and spontaneous and me  
but you've got to help me.

You've got to hold out your hand  
even when that's the last thing I seem to want.

Only you can wipe away from my eyes  
the blank stare of the breathing dead.

Only you can call me into aliveness.

Each time you're kind, and gentle, and encouraging,  
each time you try to understand because you really care,  
my heart begins to grow wings--  
very small wings,  
very feeble wings,  
but wings!

With your power to touch me into feeling  
you can breathe life into me.  
I want you to know that.  
I want you to know how important you are to me,  
how you can be a creator--an honest-to-God creator--  
of the person that is me  
if you choose to.  
You alone can break down the wall behind which I tremble,  
you alone can remove my mask,  
you alone can release me from my shadow-world of panic,  
from my lonely prison,  
if you choose to.  
Please choose to.

Do not pass me by.  
It will not be easy for you.  
A long conviction of worthlessness builds strong walls.  
The nearer you approach to me  
the blinder I may strike back.  
It's irrational, but despite what the books say about man  
often I am irrational.  
I fight against the very thing I cry out for.  
But I am told that love is stronger than strong walls  
and in this lies my hope.  
Please try to beat down those walls  
with firm hands but with gentle hands  
for a child is very sensitive.

Who am I, you may wonder?  
I am someone you know very well.  
For I am every man you meet  
and I am every woman you meet.

In our lives, we all wear masks. We all know what it is like to put on a front and pretend that everything is always ok. We wear the mask of fear, and pride. We mask our own emotions. We wear the mask of success. We put up walls because we have been hurt and we do not want to give people the opportunity to hurt us again. Our mask is the way we show the world how we would like to be seen and not who we are

When we are baptized with water and the Spirit (touch baptismal font) we remove our masks and we begin to see ourselves the way God sees us with all of our flaws and imperfections God loves us. When we are baptized we open ourselves to the Holy Spirit by removing our masks and placing them at the foot of the cross (Put mask in front of altar). We repent of our sins, are cleansed with water, and are filled with the Holy Spirit

Just as Jesus' identity was made known at his baptism, ours is made known at our baptism when we claim our identity in Jesus Christ and are sustained in our faith by being Baptized with water and the Holy Spirit.

(Back to pulpit)

It is not a coincidence that our United Methodist Church symbol is the cross and flame. This symbol has three meaning: the Trinity, warmth, and ecumenism. This symbol relates our church to God by the second and third persons of the Trinity<sup>4</sup>

- The Cross (Jesus)
- The flame (the Holy Spirit)

Warmth is conveyed by the use of the flame hoping that it is

- inviting and that others will have an experience like John Wesley at Aldersgate when his heart was strangely warmed by the Holy Spirit.

Finally, ecumenism, our hope to be united with other Christians in the body of Christ, is conveyed by the two part flame which also represents the merger in 1968 of two denominations: The Methodist Church and the Evangelical United Brethren Church.

You see the Holy Spirit is in our Christian and United Methodist DNA. Jesus made himself known to us by his Baptism where all three persons of the Trinity were present. We live out our baptism with the Holy Spirit when we live out our faith by constantly allowing God to work through us and remove our masks so that others can see in us the authentic and indescribable love of God.

Next week we will participate in the Baptismal renewal service. In this service you will have an opportunity to again touch the Baptismal waters where the Holy Spirit has come and remember your baptism and be thankful. I encourage all of you to take a hard look at your lives this week and think about the masks you need to remove. When you come to this baptismal renewal service next week I invite you to leave your masks at the foot of the cross and find new life in Christ once again by recommitting yourself to live out your baptism.

May the Holy Spirit continue to sustain you along your way as you grow in faith of Jesus Christ, remove your mask, and remember your baptism with water and the Holy Spirit.

In the name of the father, the Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

## Endnotes

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<sup>1</sup> John Pacheco. Water in the Old Testament: A Sign of God's Presence. Cited 8 January 2010. Online: <http://www.domestic-church.com/CONTENT.DCC/19980301/SCRMNTL/WATER.HTM>.

<sup>2</sup> The Barnabus Ministry. Cited 8 January 2010. Online: <http://www.barnabasministry.com/seminary-ot-covenants.html>.

<sup>3</sup> Mardi Gras History. Cited 8 January 2010. Online: <http://www.mardigrasneworleans.com/history.html>.

<sup>4</sup> History of the United Methodist Cross and Flame. Cited 8 January 2010. Online: <http://www.bmk.ee/jonah/history.htm>.