

Remember Your Baptism

Mark 1:4-11

John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. And people from the whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem were going out to him, and were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. Now John was clothed with camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. He proclaimed, "The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the thong of his sandals. I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit." In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. And a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased."

[ed. note: when this sermon was delivered, youth sitting in the sanctuary had cheap water guns. They were instructed to shoot water straight into the air every time I said the word 'baptism.' They assisted brilliantly.]

Let's start our sermon this morning with a little survey. Raise your hand if you remember your baptism. Okay, now raise your hand if you can't remember your baptism, but have heard stories about it, or seen pictures. Okay, so the rest of you have either not been baptized, or you have, but you don't know anything about it.

Fair enough. Let me tell you a little bit about my baptism. I was born here in Wisconsin, but my parents took me back to Maine, to my mother's childhood church. Picture your typical white, idyllic, New England, Congregational church, complete with steeple. Actually, kind of like Crossroads, but much smaller and with hard wooden pews. I was given a rose at my baptism, which I still have, pressed in my baby book. It was a picture-perfect, ordinary baptism. Except, perhaps, for one... tiny... detail. Joe Perham, the man who baptized me, has an entire comedy record – about outhouses.

That's right friends, I was baptized by a man who has an entire comedy record about outhouses! You see, Joe was only a pastor part-time. The rest of the time, he listened to all the tall tales told by the local lumberjacks, and he retold them as part of his comedy career.

Outhouses, hunting dogs, north woods adventures – you name it, he’s told far-fetched (but entertaining) stories about them all.

To be honest, that’s all I know about my baptism. But during the rituals of confirmation and reaffirmation of faith, the pastor says, “Remember your baptism, and be thankful.” And something tells me I’m not supposed to be remembering the story about “The Old Two-Holer.” Because baptism is important. It’s so important that Jesus, the Christ, the Messiah, the savior, the King of kings, the son of God, the one person who could get along without it... even Jesus was baptized. So when we remember our baptism, what exactly are we supposed to be remembering?

Well, obviously the first thing that comes to mind is remembering our own baptism. Today, it would be unusual if a family didn’t take pictures at a baptism. But 30 years ago, that wasn’t the norm. So there aren’t even pictures of my baptism. All I have is a dried, flattened rose. But that rose is a tangible reminder of the fact that my baptism did happen. Here, the tradition is to give baptized babies a quilt. Decades later, that quilt will be a way for those babies to remember their baptism. But even if you don’t have a rose, or a quilt, or some other keepsake, if you are baptized, your name is written down somewhere, in the records of some church. Probably in more than one record book. So even if you can’t remember the experience, there is evidence of that day you can look to.

But perhaps it’s more fun, instead, to remember someone else’s baptism. A baptism when you were old enough to see, and feel, and remember. Especially if the one being baptized was important to you. I remember when my younger sister was baptized. My grandparents were visiting for the occasion. My parents asked me if I wanted to stay in the nursery, or come to worship for the baptism. I wanted to be there, so I was upset when my grandmother dropped me off in the nursery. I can still vividly remember standing at the door of the nursery, looking at the

line where the tile floor met the carpet, desperately hoping someone would come get me. It turns out, I don't actually remember the baptism part of the day. But I do remember clearly how important the day was, and how excited I was to be part of it. And remembering your baptism also means recalling the emotions and associations around it.

But if we want to focus more on the actual baptism than on the emotions of the day, it might be helpful to remember Jesus' baptism. Jesus was probably about 30 years old, and he hadn't yet begun his public ministry of preaching and healing. He had no disciples of his own. He went out to the wilderness to find John, and he asked to be baptized. John is flabbergasted. He was supposed to get things ready for Jesus, to announce his coming. Not to baptize him like any ordinary sinner. The story in Luke goes into much greater detail about this awkward encounter between Jesus and John. But here in Mark, it's a three-sentence deal! For Mark, the conversation between Jesus and John just isn't that important. There are two things that are important for him to remember as he tells the story.

First, Jesus was baptized. He certainly didn't need to have his sins washed away, physically or metaphorically. But Jesus came to live his life as one of us, showing us how we can restore our relationship with God. He wasn't baptized because he needed it, but because we need it. He wanted to show us that this is the first step, the beginning. This is how we join the fellowship of believers and join ourselves into the family of God.

Second, Mark makes sure to record God's voice. Jesus comes up out of the water, and everyone standing there hears a voice. God's own voice, heard so rarely since the earliest days of the Old Testament, affirms "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased." Any time God speaks, we should probably write that down. But even more so here, because God has just let us all in on the fact that Jesus is his son!

Of course, the next time someone asks you to remember your baptism, you could even remember this worship service. I'm guessing that the water guns will be a memorable sermon prop. In fact, they serve as a parable.

“And Jesus said, baptism is like a worship service where people are randomly squirting water guns. And later, Nathaniel said, ‘Lord, we do not understand this teaching about water guns.’ Jesus said, ‘Do you still not understand? Baptism, like water guns, is wet. There is a direct correlation there. But baptism, like a worship service where there are squirt guns, is also memorable. It is surprising and startling. It is a break from the normal pattern of life. And it is also a challenge to enter, because we’re not sure we always want to fully engage. But in hindsight, what we really remember is how much fun it was, and maybe even how much we want to share it with others.’ And the disciples took their Super Soakers to Jerusalem, and Judea, and Samaria, and the ends of the earth.”

It turns out, when someone asks you to remember your baptism and be thankful, there are a number of things you might remember. The stories and pictures of your own baptism are just the beginning. You can remember the feelings and relationships surrounding any baptism you’ve witnessed. You can remember the solidarity Jesus showed when he was baptized, or the way God affirmed him. You can remember that baptism is as fun, challenging, and memorable as water guns. You can remember all these things and more, but why bother? What’s the point? Why do we even have a worship service designed to reaffirm our baptism?

Because baptism changes who we are. It changes our identity. The point is to remember that we are baptized, so we can live changed lives as those who have been invited into the family of Christ. Martin Luther, the great reformer from Germany, found great meaning in remembering his own baptism. In his Large Catechism, he wrote, “To appreciate and use Baptism aright, we must draw strength and comfort from it when our sins or conscience oppress us, and we must retort, ‘But I am baptized! And if I am baptized, I have the promise that I shall be saved and have eternal life, both in soul and body.’” When he was struggling particularly, he was known to mutter under his breath, or declare right out loud, “I am baptized. I am baptized.”

Historians tell us Luther was baptized when he was one day old. And in the 1500s, there were no photographs of that day. But whenever he needed spiritual strength, Luther would remember his baptism. He would remember that he was baptized. Because that meant that he was part of the family of God, and though things might not go the way he wanted, God would be with him even into eternity.

You all know I'm a big Harry Potter fan. In the first movie, Neville gets a special magical device called a remembrall. It's a glass ball filled with white smoke. When the smoke turns red, you've forgotten something. As soon as Neville picks it up, the smoke turns red. Then his face turns red and he gets embarrassed. He admits, "Only problem is, I can't remember what I've forgotten!" And that happens to all of us. We forget something so completely, we can't even remember to call it to mind. So allow me to help you a little this morning.

(while squirting my water gun furiously)

Remember your baptism! Remember your baptism! Remember your baptism! Amen and amen.

Neville's remembrall – I've forgotten what I'm supposed to remember!

What does it mean to remember your baptism?

- I. Remember pictures/stories of your baptism
- II. Remember a baptism you've witnessed, esp. someone impt. to you
- III. Remember Jesus' baptism
- IV. Remember today's worship service
- V. Get baptized.