

THE MESSAGE**February 28, 2010****Luke 3:7-9; 21-22****The Rev. Dr. R. K. Miller*****Rooted: Baptism and Beginnings***

Our focus today is baptism and new beginnings. Baptism is where God's grace is literally poured out upon us through water and the word. In baptism God touches ordinary lives with extraordinary grace. So welcome to the glocal community of "faith-walkers!" That's what we are faith-walkers – locally and globally.

You and I are grafted, rooted into Christ, into his body, into his church (we learned about that last week). You and I are claimed and adopted into God's holy family. We are called! Chosen! Saved! Born again! Forgiven and free to live without excuses as part of God's glocal missional movement in the world.

In other words, we are part of something really big. I mean *really* big. You and I are sealed with the Holy Spirit and marked with the cross of Christ forever! That's big.

In baptism God connects with us in a personal way. God's love and mercy, stakes a claim on our lives. In baptism, God is saying "you belong to me, physically and spiritually." God can make such a claim on our lives because of God's love for us, because of what God is. God is the creator of all things.

Do you ever stop to think about your relationship with God? Do you ever think about how we worship an awesome and amazing God? Allow me to put this love relationship into perspective for you. Check out this video by Francis Chan. A pastor in California... It's called "The Awe Factor."
(http://www.crazylovebook.com/videos_awe.html)

Are you speechless? Amazed? Humbled? I am, every time I watch that video. WOW! God is so big. We can't even begin to comprehend how big God really is. And yet, God wants to be in a love relationship with each one of us. That's the God we worship. The creator of the universe claims us in the waters of baptism. We are God's very own. We belong to God, all of us.

For me baptism is one of the most exciting parts of doing ministry. It is a privilege and an honor for me to stand at the font and take a baby (youth or adult) in my arms and birth them into God holy family.

And yet, it's God's idea. And it's God's doing, not mine. I'm simply a servant of the Lord. I am not worthy (I mean it, I am not worthy) to untie Jesus' sandals. I'm not! Nobody is.

When I stand at the baptismal font I'm reminded that baptism is the start of something new – the start of a new life as a disciple of Jesus. It's the start of a love relationship with the Lord so that we can be in mission together in the world that God loves.

At the end of Matthew's Gospel the very last things Jesus says to his disciples is this:

“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age” (Matthew 28:19-20).

We call this “The Great Commission.” We share this global mission as disciples of Jesus. Notice the very first word is “go.” It is not – “come” but – “go” Go and make disciples of all nations. It's a two step process that takes a lifetime to complete. There is nothing passive about being a disciple of Christ Jesus.

This two step process looks like this. First -- we are to baptize in the Trinitarian language of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. This first step is all about our relationship with God. Second -- we are about teaching (it's an on-going thing) teaching everyone to obey everything that Jesus has commanded. This second step is all about our relationship with each other.

Do you hear what Jesus is saying here? Obey his commands. Question, what are his commands? There are two. They can be summed up in this way. *Love God* and *Love Others*. (Notice it makes the sign of the cross. The cross reminds us about love +)

One day some religious fanatics came up to Jesus and asked him which command is the greatest. There were over 600 commandments at the time. This was trick question. *Jesus answered, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.” That's the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it. “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”* (Matthew 22:37-39)

According to Jesus we are on this earth to be loved (by God) and to love (others). It's all about love.

The word *love* is so miss-used, over-used, worn-out and misconstrued in our society. Listen to these words from St. Paul in his letter to the Corinthians. He writes,

If I have faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give away all my possessions to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but do not have love, I gain nothing (1 Corinthians 13:2-3).

WOW! According to St. Paul (who by the way is saying the same thing as Jesus) we are on this earth to love because we are loved by God. Nothing else matters, nothing! Not our house, not our cars, not our bank accounts, not our jobs, not our stuff. You name it. Nothing matters without love.

Love is our baptismal calling. Check out these words about love (I put them up on the screen so you can see them). Let's read them together out loud.

Love is patient, love is kind. Love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. Love does not insist on its own way. Love is not irritable or resentful. Love does not rejoice in wrong doing but rejoices in the truth. Love bears all things believes all things hopes all things endures all thing. Love never fails... And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love. (1 Corinthians 13:4-8a,13)

This is the kind of love Jesus expects from us. So, let's do a little exercise. This exercise is offered by Francis Chan in his Book *Crazy Love*. One of our LIFE Groups is using this book for their study this semester and it's changing their lives. Francis says, using these verses about love substitute your name in place every time the word "love" appears. Do so now.

WOW! By the end don't you feel like a liar? I mean, if this is what it means to love people then we fail miserably. That's why is it so important that we repent daily and believe regularly in the promises of God's grace poured out for us in the waters of Baptism. And then live our lives in gratitude because God's grace is enough.

In our reading today from Luke those coming out to be baptized by John failed to love. They failed to repent. They failed to believe in God's promises. They believed their heritage and traditions would save them.

So John calls them a "brood of vipers." In other words a snake pit. They weren't interested in living lives of gratitude in response to God's love and grace in their lives. They were only interested in living in ssssssin for themselves. They just wanted to slither around in their own world and do their own thing. They came out to be baptized just in case.

John points out that baptism isn't a ticket to heaven. It's a radical call to live life differently in the world, right now. Baptism is a death to oneself and selfish gains and a birth to a new life of mission for the sake of others.

Consider this: If life is a river, then living our baptismal calling requires us to swim up stream. When we stop swimming, when we stop actively following Jesus and his way of love, we automatically begin to be swept down stream.

Francis Chan in his book *Crazy Love* writes and I agree with him, “[Unfortunately,] much of the American church-going population, while not specifically swimming down stream, is slowly floating away from Christ. It isn’t a conscious choice, but it is nonetheless happening because little in their lives propels them to Christ.”

He goes on to say that we do not have to work our way to Jesus on the contrary “we are saved by grace through faith by the gift of God and that true faith manifests itself in our actions. As James says, ‘Faith by itself, if not accompanied by action, is dead’ (James 2:17). “

Chan then makes this bold statement – “The lives of many people who call themselves ‘Christian’ in America lack manifestation of a vital and active faith.”

He continues: “And this, to be perfectly honest, frightens me. It keeps me up at night. It causes me to pray desperately and fervently for my congregation, for the groups of people I speak to, and for the church as a whole.”

Now I know why I feel the way I do. I share Chan’s concern for our life together in the church. And the global mission we are called to be about for Jesus.

Folks that’s why I need to say to you here today. In baptism God has put a claim on your life. You belong to God. God is in love with you and that makes all the difference. Are you simply going to drift down stream away from Jesus or are you going to do something worthwhile for him today and everyday? Do you realize that nothing you do in this life will ever matter unless it’s about loving God and loving the people that God has made?

Two thirds, two thirds of the earth is covered with water. It is the most abundant element on this planet. And it is the means by which God pours out his love and grace into our lives. The next time you get a drink of water -- you hold in your hand a glass of God’s grace. The next time you take a shower -- you have God’s grace flowing down over you. The next time it snows – it is God’s way to cover the earth with grace. The next time it rains – it is God’s way to pour out his blessing of grace on one and all.

The next time you wash your hands may it remind you of your baptism and your baptismal calling. So consider this: Wherever you go there you are to be loved by God and to love others. It is our baptismal calling. Amen.