

**Meditation for Baptism of Jesus Sunday¹
and
a Membership Sunday for TUMC
January 8, 2017**

I realize that the most important part of our morning has already occurred.

I, along with many of you, value membership Sundays for several reasons.

First, because of the precious opportunity we have on these mornings to hear the faith stories of the persons who join our community. As well we hear the story of new and growing relationships between the faith partners and our new members.

The story of this relationship has the potential to inspire our own relationship building among each other.

And finally it's a special morning because we renew our own Christian commitments.

I invite you to look again at the commitment we read out loud with each other.

When we read this together we are summoned anew to become a community in which the wholeness of Christ is realized. What does that mean? As we freely receive Pablo and Jinah, we do so even as Christ has received us.

We joyfully accept them as partners both in the care of each other, our spiritual family, and in our mission to the world.

As I said at the beginning of our membership ritual, it is our tradition to welcome people into our faith community and into the Christian

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faith through baptism or upon confession of faith recognizing their earlier baptism.

We model these baptismal commitments and our renewal of our own commitments on our understanding of baptism as it is described to us in Scripture.

This morning in my brief reflection I will look again at Jesus' baptism and how that functions as a model for our own.

How can we model our baptism on Jesus' baptism you might ask? Isn't his baptism – separate, special, uniquely his as a beloved son of God?

I'll respond to that question with an example of my own struggle to find an answer.

Often when one goes on a retreat, at the beginning of it, one is invited to read a scripture passage, spend some time with it, imagine yourself in the text if you can, or imagine what words or images from the text stand out for you. A version of that is called *Lectio divina*, or divine reading, a reading where one seeks to hear something from the Spirit, or God. Jesus' baptism is a commonly chosen text for this task. In this text or imagined scene Jesus has come to the Jordan River. John is baptizing lots of people and Jesus as one of the others asks to be baptized also, and even though John resists, Jesus insists that it needs to be so, to fulfill the Scriptures.

A ritual bath of purification known in Hebrew as the *mikveh* was commonly practiced by the Jewish people of Jesus time. So baptism by full immersion was not necessarily unique. What seems to be unique in this passage is the moment when Jesus comes up out of

the water and he sees the heavens open and a dove shaped form of the Holy Spirit descending upon him and hears the voice that says, "You are my beloved son in whom I am well pleased."

Again in a Lectio Divina reading, one is invited to imagine that the voice that Jesus hears is directed also to oneself. What does it mean to hear the voice of God, the voice of the Divine as it connects with the voice of your own soul deep within you, naming you, each of you, as beloved, beloved child of God and to know deep within yourself that you are, as you are, deeply pleasing to God.

If any of you are like me you may find yourself resisting that kind of direct address from the divine or believing that it can happen. Or you might ask, "isn't this Jesus uniquely beloved, uniquely chosen, uniquely Son of God? If so, then how can this voice also say the same thing to me?"

After all, as a wise woman once told me, we are *followers* of Christ we are not Christ. And yet, the Gospel of John chapter 1 reminds us, that Christ gives us power to also become children of God. And I have also been taught that as we follow Christ, as we commit ourselves to follow Christ, that over time we become more like Christ.

And what is it that happens next to God's beloved Son, Jesus, at his baptism? This Holy Spirit and the voice from heaven don't just **name him**, they also **claim him** for it says that immediately after his baptism, the spirit drives him into the wilderness and shows him there what his mission will look like - what he's called to do in light of his status as a beloved, chosen child of God.

And so, when we try to figure out what all of this means for us it can help to look at this and other texts and other streams of interpretation in the Bible that join together to make one powerful river of interpretation. The other texts that we look at a lot at this time of year throughout Advent, Christmas and Epiphany, are the texts from Isaiah.

Isaiah 42, read earlier in this service, talks about the claimed and chosen one of Israel who will be so gentle as not to bruise a reed or dim a wick.

By chosen one, did Isaiah mean the whole tribe of the children of Israel here, or a single messiah, or King Cyrus, or an ideal form of King David?

The scholars debate all of that, but we see “chosen” language repeated over and over again in Isaiah and then echoes of that here at Jesus’ Baptism, - a beloved Son of God who Matthew says, by pointing to Isaiah texts, fulfills the Jewish hopes of God’s return to *heal* and *save* the people – not as the kings and emperors of this world – but in the new way as revealed to Jesus in the desert scene that follows.

Jesus has been named and claimed, chosen if you will, for a particular mission.

And then if we also accept and receive confirmation at our baptism that we too are beloved children of God our stream joins this stream to become a river of interpretation and understanding. This river of interpretation and understanding of our baptism

joins all of us into the river of God
that will not be denied,
the river that will get us all wet,
the river that should we choose to accept our mission
names us, claims us, and draws us into our mission which today in
this moment on this membership Sunday we name as
being community,
being spiritual care for each other,
and being partners in the mission of Christ in this world
That mission in its particularity will be what in each new time we
discern that mission to be.
but fundamentally it will include revealing
God's healing and saving purposes.
Modeling our baptism on the baptism of Jesus reveals to us that
All of us
as beloved children of God
are named, claimed and on a mission.
May it be so.