

1.5.2025 Sermon

The Baptism of Jesus | Matthew 3:13-17

SPEAKERS

Rev. Sophia A. Foutres

Sleepy? Are you feeling sleepy? You can say, "Yeah, this is like the end of the weeks between Christmas and New Year's, where you've eaten, you've drunk, you've been merry. Maybe you've been married. We've got some people who got married, and maybe you're in a little coma now."

So, wake up anyway. Good morning. I'm also so happy it's baptism day because I got to wear my new Eagle sweatshirt, which I'd never wear a sweatshirt to preach. But go birds! You've got a lot of Eagles gear in here tonight. Anyway, last-minute wardrobe change.

Today is baptism day, and I want to just come clean. Since it's baptism day, it's about kind of getting washed. I plagiarized this sermon today, so from myself. I preached it last year, but I didn't use ChatGPT, so at least you won't have to like, type it in and see if I used it.

Baptism day is one of my favorite days in the whole church. Oh, somebody said, "That was cute." I community. Richard Rohr says this from his book *The Divine Dance*: "Our starting place was always original goodness, not original sin. This makes our ending place and everything in between possessing an inherent capacity for goodness, truth, and beauty."

See, in the beginning, God created for six days and said that all things that God made were good, right? And then when God made humans, God said, "Look at you guys. So good." This is our beginning. When we were created, we were very good. We were very good.

So, do we mess up? Of course. Are we human? Absolutely. But our beginning and our core are good, and very, very good.

And so, this common theology, have you ever heard of that theology, Original Sin? Right, that we all just start off broken, right? Do you know what it's like going through life, always thinking that there's just something wrong with you? Right?

I'll tell you what, it sucks. I'm serious, it sucks. Some of y'all are probably still thinking that right now, that there's just something inherently wrong with you, right? And I've lived... I've lived. Would you say I've lived 34 years believing that there was just always something wrong with me? Now, I'm 38 now, and I don't believe that anymore.

Because, listen, whether you're gay, whether you're straight, whether you're black, whether you're white, whether you're Asian, whether you're Jewish, whether you're Palestinian, whether you're the poorest of poor in this room or you're the richest of rich, nothing can ever take away your inherent very goodness that God pronounced at the beginning.

But unfortunately, Christians now, I'm serious, it's not funny, for the sake of control, oppression, and fear, and a movement of colonization of marginalized people groups, the message lost its starting place. Most places of faith want to introduce you to Jesus from Genesis three, not Genesis one. And you know what? That's not right.

In Genesis three, what happens? The fall. Look, it was serious, right? I'm not making light of what happened, but that part being the beginning is a disrespect to the person of Jesus. It's a disrespect to what the gospel word even means, to share the very good, too good to be true news.

It's a disrespect for centuries for people to proclaim over human beings, "It's us and it's them, it's you and it's everybody else. You're broken, you're bad, you need fixing, and once you get that way, you're better than everybody else."

That's not the gospel, folks. That is a skewed version of ego and power that exists today in a disgusting way across, especially Western Christianity, and it's wrong because in the beginning, when God made humans, God said, "Very good."

And the Spirit hovered over the earth, and it was the first baptism. The Spirit hovered and said, "This is very good." And then the fall happens, and people did a lot of crazy stuff in the Bible, which, in my opinion, was wild, and it did need a redemption. It did need somebody who could step in and say, "Not like that, but maybe like this."

So, Jesus comes on the scene, but first, John comes on the scene. He's the Baptizer, and he comes in, and he's baptizing. What he's doing is a very, very blatant political statement of that day. And he's saying, "I'm letting you know, there's a way coming that is not like Rome, that is not like what you see in this culture. It's not power and dominance, but it's immersion, and it's love. There's something different, and it's going to be against every political and religious way of the day."

And Jesus says, "I need to be baptized by you" when he comes on the scene. And in doing this, Jesus gives us a symbol in saying, "I'm getting baptized to show the world that I'm not like the religions of the day. I'm not like the power or the violence or the us and them, but I'm doing this to align, to say I'm bringing a message that is different than what you're used to."

And it goes like this: "Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan to be baptized by him."

And John tried to prevent him, saying, "I need to be baptized by you. Why do you come to me?" But Jesus answered him, "Let it be so, for now, for it is proper for us, in this way, to fulfill all righteousness." And then he consented.

Jesus had been baptized by John, and just as he came up from the water, suddenly, the heavens were opened as they were at creation. He saw what looked like the Spirit of God descending like a dove and resting upon him. And the voice from heaven said, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased."

In this moment, we get the second restoration of that first moment where the Spirit of God hovers and says, "I make humans very good." And Jesus says, "I'm coming to show you a better way." And the Spirit of God rests on him and says, "This is My beloved Son."

So, here's the beautiful thing about this, a couple of things. That word "Beloved" literally means to have a personal experience of God's unconditional love, to be totally loved, not because of something, not because of whatever, just because you are unconditionally loved.

And the beautiful thing is that Jesus gets his blessing before he does any ministry, before he's the Messiah, before he does any works to prove who He is. Did you catch that? That's the blessing we get too.

This baptism is a way that you say, "Before I do, I am. I was, and after I did, I didn't, I don't. I am the beloved child, son, daughter, person of God." And that's the original blessing that comes through baptism, that we remember today.

Richard Rohr, again, says, "We can't start a spiritual journey on a negative foundation. If we just seek God out of fear, guilt, or shame, or because it's something we just have to do, or we're supposed to because we've been tormented or feared into it because we're bad and broken and need fixing, we won't ever go very far."

If we start negative in our spiritual journeys, we stay negative. If the story that's written for us in our faith journeys is that we're bad and broken and we need fixing, then we never truly transform because we stay at a place of smallness and feeling like we're pieces of crap.

We have to begin positive, from that original goodness, by a wonderful experience, by something that's larger than life, by something that dips us into the depths of our own being. That's what that word baptism means: to be dipped into.

And Jesus shows us that he hasn't done or said a single thing up until now. And you know, until we know we're a beloved human, we don't really have much to say. We're so filled with self-doubt, fear, and self-punishment that we don't have a lot of good news for ourselves or for the world.

And in Jesus' baptism, he's dipped into that unifying mystery of life, death, and resurrection. And that's where it all begins. It began for him, and it begins for us there, that you, me, and all of us, are beloved sons, daughters, children with whom God is well-pleased. And nothing and no one, no system, no hierarchy, no president, no king, no queen, can change that reality.

And if we've never had anyone believe in us, or take delight in us, affirm us, or call us beloved, we don't have a place to begin that gives us life. It's just a rat race of trying to get back and be good and be good enough. And we know that that doesn't work. A lot of us have tried.

I believe that the main message of the gospel is for us to communicate this truth together and to demonstrate it today through baptism, that the old order of things in our lives has passed away, and we can agree with and be baptized with Christ, and come up with Christ in new life, in blessing, in goodness.

So that we can go out and be the blessings. So that we can go out and be the people who baptize with that message, with that clarity, with that peace, with that justice. We are not the people who go out and use our message to baptize people into fear or into hatred or into division, but we baptize them and say, "There is a better way."

And that's why the word continues. And it's not just about today. This is an important moment, but there's that call then to God: "Go therefore and make disciples, make others who follow this way, baptizing them into that Trinity, into the dance of God, the child, the father, the parent, the Spirit, teaching them to obey everything that has been commanded, and to remember always."

Jesus says in this text, "Bless you, and I am with you always to the end of the age."

And that's my prayer: that we would today, as we baptize together, know that the old is gone, whether that be a narrative, a lifestyle, a decision, a fear, a faith system, the old is gone, and the new has come.

And my prayer is that we would continually wash ourselves and others in this deep nature and reality of a God that is so connected to us and both.

Excuse me. Baptism is this experience of deeply receiving and knowing that we are the beloved of God. As we enter into these waters today and come up receiving that original blessing, that you, my child, are very, very good, and you are loved now. Live and love others, and serve and stay connected to me.

Baptism doesn't make us good. It reminds us and aligns us with the voice of heaven that has been there from the start of our inherent worth. Whoever you are, whoever you love, whatever you look like, whatever your calling, you belong in the belovedness of God.

So, let's pray together.

God, as we prepare to baptize, may these and all of us, as we witness, receive, and rest in this great truth that has been here from the beginning, that we are the beloved of God in Christ, and nothing can take that away from us—that we started from being loved. We don't earn it, but we live, and we learn to live from it and give it away.

Lord, let your Spirit rest upon us today, even more so. Give us an awareness that your Spirit is already here, and help us to experience that love in full and bring a love revolution to this world. In Jesus' name, Amen.

And now I'd like for our baptizees to make their way up front, and we'll prepare to baptize. So, if you just join us in prayer and cheering, if you want to take pictures, you can.