

Introduction

Check-in & Introductions

Here is My Servant

Old Testament Lesson

Isaiah 42:1-9 (NRSVUE)

Here is my servant, whom I uphold,
my chosen, in whom my soul delights;
I have put my spirit upon him;
he will bring forth justice to the nations.

²He will not cry out or lift up his voice
or make it heard in the street;

³a bruised reed he will not break,
and a dimly burning wick he will not quench;
he will faithfully bring forth justice.

⁴He will not grow faint or be crushed
until he has established justice in the earth,
and the coastlands wait for his teaching.

⁵Thus says God, the Lord,
who created the heavens and stretched them out,
who spread out the earth and what comes from it,
who gives breath to the people upon it
and spirit to those who walk in it:

⁶I am the Lord; I have called you in righteousness;
I have taken you by the hand and kept you;
I have given you as a covenant to the people,
a light to the nations,

⁷to open the eyes that are blind,
to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon,
from the prison those who sit in darkness.

⁸I am the Lord; that is my name;
my glory I give to no other,
nor my praise to idols.

⁹See, the former things have come to pass,
and new things I now declare;
before they spring forth,
I tell you of them.

Gospel Lesson

Matthew 3:13-17 (NRSVUE)

Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan, to be baptized by him. ¹⁴John would have prevented him, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?" ¹⁵But Jesus answered him, "Let it be so now, for it is proper for us in this way to fulfill all righteousness." Then he consented. ¹⁶And when Jesus had been baptized, just as he came up from the water, suddenly the heavens were opened to him and he saw God's Spirit descending like a dove and alighting on him. ¹⁷And a voice from the heavens said, "This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased."

Bible/Sermon Focus

Each year in the liturgical calendar, the Sunday immediately after the Christmas season is designated as "Baptism of the Lord" Sunday. The celebration of Jesus's baptism gives the church the opportunity to remember the significance of baptism in our own lives. For some, it is an opportunity to remember their baptism. For others, it is an opportunity to anticipate their baptism, or to reflect on the meaning of baptism generally.

The Gospel reading for the day recounts the story of Jesus being baptized by John. This story appears in the three synoptic Gospels: Matthew, Mark, and Luke. In Matthew's version, John protests when Jesus asks him to be baptized. Jesus replies, "Let it be so now, for it is proper for us in this way to fulfill all righteousness."

In other words, Jesus tells John that God is at work here, and encourages him to align what he is doing with God's work.

God is at work in baptism; what we do is align ourselves with God's actions. The sacrament of baptism is considered to be a "means of grace" in United Methodist theology. That means that in the sacrament, the Holy Spirit conveys grace upon the individual and among the community. Baptism is an action of the Spirit.

The promises that are made as a part of the baptism liturgy are, therefore, made in response to what God does. It's not like we promise our prayers, presence, gifts, service, and witness and then God will allow us to be baptized. Quite the opposite.

Having received the gift of grace through baptism, we respond with promises of our own. And for United Methodists those promises are ordered in the five categories mentioned above – prayers, presence, gifts, service, and witness. And importantly, these are promises made in community, not alone. We promise to "participate in the ministries of the church" via these five practices.

That is because baptism is something that happens within a congregation. It is a communal event. Among the things that happen in baptism, the person being baptized is “incorporated into” the Body of Christ. They become a member of the body.

The Holy Spirit is at work among us, within us. God calls us. God keeps us. God gives us as a light to the world. In the sacrament of baptism, we witness the work of the Spirit and promise to re-order our lives to align with divine direction.

Discussion Questions

1. What do you remember about your own baptism?
2. How have you felt called, kept, and given by God?
3. Ruth Duck wrote, “We are not called to be Christians alone.” Do you agree? Why or why not?
4. How easy is it for you to quantify your discipleship promises of prayer, presence, gifts, service, and witness?
5. Other than baptism, what are other “means of grace” in your life?

Prayer

By your grace, O God, we are incorporated into your mighty acts of salvation. We are woven into the fabric of the community. We become chosen family. So, thank you. Thank you for the waters of baptism that wash us, refresh us, and renew us. And now give us faith, and guide us to respond by re-ordering our lives according to your call. At the direction of the Spirit, **Amen.**

“Through the sacrament of baptism we are initiated into Christ’s holy church. We are incorporated into God’s mighty acts of salvation and given new birth through water and the Spirit. All this is God’s gift, offered to us without price.” (UMC Baptismal Liturgy)