

The Baptism of our Lord – 01/07/2024

We make decisions every day of how close we want to get to someone, physically and emotionally. How much do we want to know about another person's business? What will be expected with having this information?

There are times that we are drawn in and find ourselves entangled and wonder how we got there. There are other times, especially if we can learn from those entanglements that we then draw boundary lines and filter or maybe even choose not to associate with a person.

It is about taking care of ourselves. Caretakers often have a problem with getting taken advantage of. We can easily forget that God did not say that we are responsible to take care of everyone's needs. Healthy relationships involve people who are able to have a give and take which involves constant communication.

Today we are challenged to look at our relationship with God. As Lutherans we believe that this can happen at infant baptism. Although we also believe that one can have a relationship with God without being baptized. Baptism is a public recognition that we are God's child and we are saying out loud.

As infants, we rely on others to teach us what it means to be a child of God. As adults, if we have not been baptized as infants, we come to a place where we are ready to publicly affirm that we are a child of God and to state this out loud. Baptism is about relationships with God in Jesus Christ and each other.

God created us to be in relationships with God and each other. Baptism states this publicly. Everyone is a child of God, but baptism says it out loud. It is a means of grace. God claims us as God's own and baptism affirms this claim.

Through baptism God offers us forgiveness, salvation and new life as gifts. It is how God says I love you, even though we don't deserve it. This is where grace comes in. Through baptism we receive God's grace, God's love.

If we are saying out loud that we are God's child and we are still infants, it is done for us. At confirmation and hopefully many other times, we affirm that we are God's child. But what does that mean?

One thing it means is that we are in a relationship with God in Jesus Christ and God has a lot to say about how we live our lives. At times it is hard to hear God's voice because we get in the way with what we want. Also, we allow ourselves to get caught up with people and things that block out our hearing of God's voice.

I am here to remind us that God will not stay away from us. God will continue to speak to us even when we are choosing not to hear. In our Gospel

lesson for today we hear that the heavens were torn apart symbolizing that God had, and was coming to earth. The Spirit descended like a dove on Jesus and God said, “You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased.”

I added the first four verses of the Gospel of Mark to our Gospel lesson to remind us that this is the beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. This good news is what we are called to share with others as children of God, that we are God’s child and so are they. John the Baptist prepared the people for Jesus’ baptism. First of all, to help them understand that his baptism was one of repentance for the forgiveness of sins and that Jesus would be baptizing with the Holy Spirit. Second that once they were baptized by Jesus that they would be believers in Jesus and saying this out loud.

It is quite interesting that Mark says that the whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem were going out to John the Baptist. They were going out to be baptized in the River Jordan, confessing their sins. This sounds like a lot of people. John was telling them what they were doing, but there was no way that they could fully understand it at that time.

John the Baptist says to the people that he had baptized them with water for the forgiveness of sins, but Jesus will baptize them with the Holy Spirit. John doesn’t say maybe, but will. I wonder if the people may have sensed that Jesus was the Messiah and they were ready to say out loud that they were God’s children, followers of Jesus Christ.

This is the beginning of the Good News, but we know as we continue to hear about Jesus encounter’s with people and church and governmental leaders, that it did not all seem like good news. There may have been times that the people did not want to hear what Jesus had to say. It may have gone against their culture, against what many were doing. They may have wanted to distance themselves from Jesus, from God’s voice. Times where they didn’t want to say out loud that they were God’s child, followers of Jesus.

I do not believe that we are any different from the followers of Jesus day. Saying out loud that we are God’s child, followers of Jesus sometimes goes against the grain of our society, even other denominations. The more that we allow God’s voice to be heard in our lives, the more changes that we will be called to make. We make decisions of how close we choose to get to God in Jesus Christ, just as we do with others.

Thus, I wonder if there are times we would like God to stay away or at least be quiet. That may sound harsh, but is it any different with fellow human beings at times. Sometimes there are things that we need to do and or say that are not easy.

I believe all of us know how to be deaf and blind when we come upon things that we do not want to deal with. The loving thing about God is that God in Jesus Christ walks with us and sometimes carries us through the tough times. Could it be that when we realize this that we are ready to say out loud again that we are God's child?

As children of God sometimes we are called to engage with people, other children of God. Sometimes it gets messy. As we move forward in our transition, there will be changes that are made.

God says to us, I'm here to walk with you, are you willing to hear my voice and follow my direction? God's voice will come through different people and occurrences. I will be the one asking the questions and will encourage you to ask questions also.

God calls and invites us into God's beloved community, and the world has changed around us. Many churches are struggling to make ends meet and lack volunteers. Does that sound a little familiar? God is calling us to something new.

Are we willing to trust God? Are we willing to listen for, and to God's voice?

Are we willing to say out loud that we are Children of God?