

Sermon 10th January 2021

“Baptism For All”

Mark 1: 4-11

Gracious God, be with us today
in this place, in the
Scriptures and in our
words.

May the words of my mouth and
the meditations of our
hearts praise your Holy
name. Amen.

God’s gift of baptism is not just
for infants.

Baptism is available to all.

God’s gift of the Holy Spirit is
for everyone.

Our reading this morning focuses
on one of the major themes
of Christianity: Baptism.

In Mark, we hear the beginning
of the story of Jesus’
baptism.

In this story, John serves as the
messenger for Jesus.

John baptizes many different
people in the Jordan River.

People from the “whole Judean
countryside” came to be
baptized.

“All the people of Jerusalem”
came.

John’s baptism is a baptism of
repentance.

He preaches the need for
repentance, which will lead
to God’s forgiveness of our
sins.

The baptism with water signifies
a cleansing or purification.

John’s baptism is similar to the
ritual washing of the Jews.

He even dresses similarly to his
predecessors, in camel’s
hair with a leather belt.

There are some important
differences though.

First of all, John stresses the need
for all people to be
baptized.

This baptism would include both
the Jews and the Gentiles.

Also, more importantly, as John
baptizes, he proclaims the
coming of Christ.

John says “I baptize you with
water, but one who comes
after me will baptize you
with the Holy Spirit.”

I wonder how many people

realized the significance of John's words?

In our world today, many are baptized.

In this church, as in others, once in a while children are baptized as infants.

In other churches, baptism occurs later.

Infant baptism.

Believers baptism.

What does it all mean?

I'm sure that you must have heard a story like this before.

A young father telephones the local minister's office and speaks to the minister.

The conversation goes something like this, "Hello, St. Peter's United Church, Rev. Jane speaking."

"Hello, is this the minister?"

"Yes, This is Jane. I'm the minister."

"Oh good, my mother said that I need to talk to you."

"Oh, what is it about?"

"Well, I want to have my kid done!"

"You mean that you would like to have your child baptized into the family of God?"

"Sure. When can I come over and get it done?"

"Well, usually I meet with the parents and child several times before the baptism to talk a little bit about what it is all about and how it will happen.

The baptismal service usually takes place as part of the regular Sunday morning worship or it can even wait until Easter.

Are you a Christian?"

"I was hoping that it could be done sooner than that.

Does it have to be in the church?

What does it matter if I am a Christian?"

Many are baptized without awareness or full recognition of all that baptism means.

Many parents treat baptism as a right of passage for their child without understanding the promises that they make with regards to how to raise their child in a Christian home and community.

I think that it is that way with many people who have been baptized.

Baptism is a ritual.

When baptized we are not sure
what we are getting
ourselves into, especially as
infants.

We don't know much about it.
On the other hand there are some
people who avoid baptism
for that very reason.
Some don't feel worthy.

John didn't feel worthy.
John said he was not worthy to
untie the thong of Jesus'
sandals.

We wonder if we are worthy of
our baptisms.
Can we really uphold a baptism
of repentance?
Can we promise to lead a Godly
life, and keep that promise
we made in our baptism?

No, we can't.

But the good news is we don't
have to be perfect.

I'm not saying that we shouldn't
try to live as Christ lived, or
love all people.

We are asked to love others.
We need to do whatever we can
to follow Jesus' example of
love.

But God knows that we won't
always succeed.

Often we will fall.
That's OK.

Because God is there to pick us
up again.
God gives us grace and love and
forgiveness.
And one of the symbolic ways
this happens is through our
baptism.

In the bible, John recognized the
limitations of water
baptism.

This baptism puts the
responsibility on people to
repent.

But, while repentance is
important, it is not a
condition of God's love.

God loves us freely and
continually.

John's disciples had received a
baptism of repentance in
anticipation of the coming
of Christ.

When the disciples heard of
Jesus, they were baptized in
the name of the Lord.

A new covenant.

The result: The Holy Spirit
entered them.

The disciples were given the gifts
of prophecy and speaking

in tongues.
Of course, not everyone is given these gifts of prophecy and speaking in tongues.
God gives many gifts to us.
One gift is the Holy Spirit, given for everyone.
That is why we still “get our kids done” even today.
Baptism is a choice to accept the gift of the Holy Spirit freely given to us.
Baptism is also an opportunity for the community to come together to offer love and support for the newly baptized person just as Christ would have done.
Baptism can also be an opportunity for parents or older children and adults being baptized to learn more about the life of Christ.

I have been baptized for over 27 years now.
Yes, I know I am young but I was not baptized as an infant!
I was actually 16 years old so my baptism would have been considered a believer’s baptism.
There was one other person in my baptism and

confirmation class.
He was 68 and was asking all the same questions that I was.
It was an opportunity for both of us to explore our faith a little more and publicly proclaim that we believe in God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit.
His name was Bill Bates.
Bill died a couple of years ago and I was honoured to be asked to go back home to speak at a committal service for him and share our story we had in common.
These are some of the reasons why we do things the way we do with baptism.
These are the reasons that would make good answers to the young father that asked some important questions.
God’s gift of the Holy Spirit is not just for the “kid that is done.”
God’s gift of the Holy Spirit is for everyone and is celebrated in public worship.
Thanks be to God for baptism.
Thanks be to God for the Holy Spirit.
Amen.