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 January 14, 2018
 Baptism of Jesus

Baptized and Beloved
Matthew 3:13-17

13 Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan, to be baptized by him.

14 John would have prevented him, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?"

15 But Jesus answered him, "Let it be so now; for it is proper for us in this way to fulfill all righteousness." Then he consented.

16 And when Jesus had been baptized, just as he came up from the water, suddenly the heavens were opened to him and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him.

17 And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased."

Today we celebrate the baptism of ***Jesus***.

Do you know ***why his baptism is so important?***

His baptism is the ***example*** for ours.

He was baptized, so we believers are baptized,

whether that's as an infant and our parents make promises until we are confirmed, or as a youth or adult we make the promises ourselves.

In baptism we ***confess our faith*** in Jesus as Lord and Savior,

we turn from sin and accept God's grace,

and we essentially begin a ***new life*** in Christ.

But ***why*** was ***Jesus baptized?***

He was ***not a sinner***,

so why would he come to John asking for baptism?

Just before this story we see John talking about the ***kind of baptism*** he offered—

it was for ***repentance***.

Which is probably why John tried to prevent Jesus from being baptized—
 why would the Son of God need it?

But Jesus tells him it is to ***fulfill all righteousness***,

In other words, it was to follow the ***will of God***,

so John consents and Jesus goes into the water,
and comes out with the voice of God saying ***this is my Son, the Beloved***,
with whom I am well pleased, and the Spirit descending on him like a dove.

In Jesus' baptism we learn that baptism is ***a sign of***
repentance and grace.

And it is also about ***identity***,
because we hear the voice of God declare Jesus' identity,
and it's about ***being prepared for a mission***—
for after the Spirit of God descends,
Jesus is sent ***by the Spirit*** into the wilderness
to be tempted three times, before beginning his three year ministry.

Did you realize that Jesus' baptism was so ***meaningful***?

Jesus baptism was an ***end*** to his life as just a carpenter
and the ***beginning*** of his ***new life*** as a preacher and teacher.
It was the beginning of his work as the Son of God, the Messiah.

This is why we read ***Isaiah 42 today***—it was a prophecy about the Messiah,
and did you notice what it said?

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

Jesus' baptism is so important for us today—
Because it is ***a sign of our new identity*** as sons and daughters of God,
and our ***preparation*** for our mission in this world.
And for us, that preparation includes the ***forgiveness and grace*** of God!
In baptism ***we repent*** of our sins, and ***we receive God's grace!***

The famous Reformation Pastor, Martin Luther,
knew that baptism was so powerful,
he knew it meant a new ***identity***.

Do you know what he used to say to encourage himself when he was
overwhelmed with life?

He would touch his forehead, and say,
Remember, Martin, you have been baptized.

Legend has it that these words were written over his desk.
Remember, you have been baptized.

That statement is ***very meaningful*** when you think about it.
 Because just as God's voice came down and said,
 this is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am pleased,
 God ***comes to us*** at our baptism, saying,
 this is my child, ***the Beloved***, with whom I am well pleased.

But do you ***think of yourself*** that way?
 As God's ***child***—the Beloved?

There's a story about a young small boy who stood shivering on a steel grate
 in the sidewalk. His clothes were thin and tattered.
 A woman, dressed warm for the weather,
 stopped and engaged the young boy in conversation.
 He was a child living on the street.
 The compassionate stranger took him to a clothing store and outfitted him
 from head to foot, including cap, scarf, and gloves.
 The boy was filled with joy and gratitude.
 He could not thank her enough.
 As they said good-bye and walked in opposite directions, he turned back to
 ask, "***Hey, are you God's mother?***"
 The woman answered, "Oh no! I'm ***just a child of God***".
 To which the smiling boy replied, "I knew you were related".

Isn't that who we are? ***children of God? The Beloved?***
 Talk about finding ***new life***, if we truly take that to heart!
 If we really remembered how the waters of baptism
wash us, make us new, and declare us beloved---
 there's nothing that can stop us in our faith!
 To be Beloved, is to ***be made new!*** Now that's ***great news!***

One pastor I like to read, David Lose, says he thinks we should practice saying
 this: ***I am God's child, and God will use me to change the world.***
 I love that. Hear that again!

Author and theologian Henri Nouwen once said that

Self-rejection is the greatest enemy of the spiritual life because it contradicts the sacred voice that calls us the "**Beloved.**" ***Being the Beloved constitutes the core truth of our existence.***" <https://www.goodreads.com/.../9477-life-of-the-beloved-spirit>.

We are the Beloved. It's our identity in Christ.
We should live with THAT as our true identity—nothing less.

In baptism, we are ***cleansed*** for new life, so we can be the beloved,
And we are prepared for ***our mission and purpose*** in this world.
With baptism comes wilderness—for Jesus, and for each one of us.
We live in the wilderness—a world of challenge, and testing, and learning.
We NEED the promises of baptism!

You know in some corners of the world baptism is taken ***very seriously***.
We could probably learn something from that—
because to be baptized is a life-changing decision.
Ideally to be baptized means we ***live differently***.

Sometimes when people are baptized they are ***risking their lives***, sometimes they risk losing their families for this decision.

I was reading about a pastor Jim Denison, who served as a summer missionary in East Malaysia, at a very small church. At one of the church's worship services, a teenage girl came forward to announce her decision to follow Christ and be baptized.

During the service, Denison noticed some worn-out luggage leaning against the wall of the church building. He asked the pastor about it. The pastor pointed to the girl who had just been baptized and told Denison, "Her father said that if she was baptized as a Christian she could never go home again. So ***she brought her luggage.***" Raymond McHenry, *Stories for the Soul* (Hendrickson, 2001)

Asian Access (or A2), a Christian missions agency in South Asia, has a series of ***questions*** some church planters have been asking new believers who are considering baptism:

1. Are you willing to leave home and lose the blessing of your father?
2. Are you willing to lose your job?
3. Are you willing to be beaten rather than deny your faith?
4. Are you willing to go to prison?

5. Are you willing to die for Jesus?

Talk about a sobering reminder for all Christians! Sometimes our brothers and sisters from other countries are threatened when they come for baptism.

South Asian nation struggles to shape itself, Mission Network News (1-17-12)

I wonder, do **we** take our own baptism *seriously enough*?

The famous sportscaster **Pat Summerall**, who died in 2013, was one of them. He was baptized after he overcame alcoholism and became a follower of Christ in his late sixties. He said: "I went down in the water, and when I came up it was like a 40-pound weight had been lifted from me. I have a happier life, a healthy life, and a more positive feeling about life than ever before."

Afterwards he was always looking for a Bible study to attend, wherever he was working.

About prayer meetings and Bible studies Summerall said: "It's like an alcoholic looking for a drink. If he wants it bad enough, he can find it—no matter what. I'm like that when it comes to finding prayer services and Bible studies. No matter where I am working, I know that they're out there and I can find them." Art Stricklin, Sports Spectrum (Nov/Dec 2001), p. 27

No matter who we are, our baptism *prepares us* for a new and different life, life in the **wilderness**.

It's where we get our **Holy Spirit power** to make it in the wilderness.

Remember how the **Israelites** wandered in the wilderness for 40 years on their way to the promised land?

That's when they learned to **fully rely** on God, where they received God's **laws**, and where they learned to **lean on one another**.

The wilderness was where **Jesus was sent** by the Spirit after his baptism to be tempted, in preparation for his ministry.

We too are sent into the wilderness.

But **not ever alone**.

That's something really important **about the wilderness** that we find in the Bible.

People are not sent there all alone.

Jesus had the Spirit with him the whole time,

and angels came to wait upon him after his three temptations.
 The **Israelites** were never all alone,
 they had the literal presence of **God** in the cloud by day and pillar of fire by
 night, and they had **one another**.
No one is alone in the wilderness.
 Not Jesus. Not us.

All too often we think of baptism as very individualistic,
 probably because we Americans are very **individualistic**.
 But baptism is not just about my salvation, my future,
 my relationship with God.
 It is also about all of us, **the body of Christ**, in the wilderness together.

It's all based on the relationship of the **Trinity**—
 God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—all together.
 This is why we baptize **in the name of** Father, Son, and Spirit.
God is community. We live in community, we're in this together.

Jesus **promised his Holy Spirit** to all who believed in him after his death,
 and we are heirs of that promise.
 Just like **Isaiah 42** says I have put my Spirit upon him,
 just like the Holy Spirit descended upon **Jesus**,
God has put his Spirit upon us.

And we have **one another**.
 No one is ever alone in the wilderness.
 We are in this **together**.
 What does that **mean to you**?

Baptism is a sign and seal of God's grace and forgiveness.
 It's a sign of our **new identity** as beloved children of God,
 We are **cleansed, forgiven, redeemed**.
 And we are **prepared for living** in this world, the wilderness.
 Baptism is a sign that we **always have the Father, Son, and Spirit** with us,
 And we have **one another**.

This is one reason why we ask the **congregation to make promises** during
 baptism, because we are all in this together.

Today as we remember the baptism of Jesus,
we also remember our **own baptism**.
Maybe you have no actual memory of it—
but the term **remember** for God's people is deeper than actual memory.
Remembrance is an **act of faith**.

This week I read about the term remembrance in Hebrew.
For God's people **to zakar, or remember**,
meant to experience again the power of the original event.
Remembrance is not just finding a fact in your mind again.
To **zakar** is to use your hands and feet and lips
to engage in an action of remembrance.
Remembrance is something you do with your **body**, not just your brain.

For instance, Chad Bird writes in his blog "*The One Hebrew Word you Don't Want to Forget*", about the **difference between how Charlie and Tom remember their wedding anniversaries**.

Tom remembered his anniversary by sending his wife a dozen red roses at work, taking her out to her favorite restaurant for dinner, and buying her a little gift that said, "I love you and I'm so happy that you're my wife."

Charlie remembered his anniversary the same way he remembered that $2+2=4$, and in 1492 Columbus sailed across the ocean, and that he's going golfing with Jeff and Marty next Saturday!

So at bedtime when his wife asked him why he he forgot their anniversary, and he said, "no, I remembered the date and I've been thinking about it all day long". That didn't impress his wife, and he wound up in the doghouse all week.
<http://www.chadbird.com/blog/2016/8/20/the-one-hebrew-word-you-dont-want-to-forget>

See the **difference**?

Remembrance for God's people is **putting faith in action**
to commemorate the event.

It's **using your whole body** to recall what was so significant.
That's what we're doing **today**—as we stand to affirm our faith,
and come forward to receive the water of baptism on our foreheads!

So, my friends,

What if we all said to ourselves quite regularly,
Remember, you have been baptized!
That's our Good News of the Gospel today!

And today we ***use our bodies*** to remember the power of that sacrament!

Today as this sermon ends,
a celebration and ***reaffirmation of your baptism*** will begin.
We, as a congregation, are invited to ***remember and reaffirm***
the ***promises and power*** of our baptism.

And if you haven't yet been baptized, affirm your faith, and then talk to me
after worship about receiving this sacrament.

If you are able, please ***stand and follow the baptism reaffirmation*** in your
bulletin insert. You will then be invited to come forward and receive a
blessing and the sign of the cross on your forehead....