

Pastor Roy's Sermon from January 10, 2016 (Baptism of our Lord)

Baptism. What does baptism mean to you?

[A sign: Forgiveness and love

A sign: We are beloved children of God.

A sign: We belong to God's beloved community of saints/sinners.

A sign: We receive the gift of the Spirit (anointing by oil)

A sign: We receive the gifts of the Spirit.

A sign: We are set apart to serve in love.]

The essence of Baptism as a sacrament is the physical sign of water combined with the Promises of God.

Everything that water is and does, baptism is and does for us.

Baptism is a lifelong adventure in faith. To remember one's baptism is to listen to faith's challenge in this moment, which may be very different than the challenge of a year ago or a year from now.

We heard today of Jesus' baptism in the Jordan. I wonder what it meant to Jesus? We tend to think of Jesus as having already arrived, that he didn't mature or learn as he lived. We must remember he was just as human as we are. Totally human. Totally God. Now there is a mystery. We won't figure that out in this sermon. Jesus was submitting to John the Baptist. Surrendering to God as John the Baptist the people to do.

After his faithful response, he hears, "You are my beloved Son, with you I am well pleased." Then he goes into the wilderness to listen to better understand his call and mission. After that he begins his ministry. Jesus is reminded in his baptism and prayerful communion that life does not begin and end with him--his mission is to pour out his life on behalf of the world. In the wilderness he learns the meaning of his baptism. He answers the invitation to surrender and trust that God, his Father, will provide. He learns to let go of self. He is freed to pray, to love, to serve.

So what is baptism for us?

Baptism is a rite of initiation into the community of faith. Baptism declares, "This life is surrendered to God." --Offered to God. This God who is the source of life and love, the source of justice and mercy at work everywhere.

But, why should we surrender ourselves and our children to God? [Responses] We speak of promises. What are some promises from God? True fulfillment and true joy? We will never be disappointed once we understand the truth of surrender and her freedom. It is never too late to embrace the full meaning of our baptism. It is never too late to surrender to the power of life and love at work all around us and within us.

In our baptismal faith, we are not asked to believe unbelievable things. We are invited on a journey in which we live by faith in the Presence of Love and mercy at work. We are invited to trust someone greater than ourselves. We are invited to entrust ourselves to the Power at work in life and love. Peace is a life lived in communion with the goodness at work within and around us. The opposite of baptismal faith is greed, self-trust, defensiveness, hoarding, fearing scarcity—not enough. Resisting is reacting against, rather than communing and listening.

Baptism is a sign and confession that life in these bodies is temporary. Someday we will die. In baptism we walk through the valley of the shadow of death and come out into freedom on the other side. In the waters of baptism we leave behind our individual and separate selves--our independence, our self-sufficiency, our "I can take care of things myself" attitude.

We surrender to God *and* the community of faith in these waters of baptism. This is why remembering our baptism is important. It is a beginning. The work of dying to self and coming alive to Christ is never finished. Always a work in progress.

We are born sinners, we die sinners. In baptism we are named saints. Holy Ones of God. No different from anyone else. The baptized have a faith confessed over them. It is a faith into which we live the rest of our lives.

Baptism is our surrender to God, to the community, to death, to mercy, to life, and to love.. Baptism constantly welcomes us back when we **forget** that we have surrendered. It is a return to the God from which we all have come and to which we all will return. I do not believe Baptism changes us, so much as it names us for who we are. The promises of baptism give us our identity as children of God who are surrendering to God. May we remember the waters of surrender and gladly accept their freedom.