

“Remembering God’s Love and Grace”

Message by DD Adams

Providence United Methodist Church

Baptism of the Lord—First Sunday After Epiphany

January 10, 2016

The gospel lesson is taken from the book of Luke, chapter 3, verses 15 and 16. “As the people were filled with expectation, and all were questioning in their hearts concerning John, whether he might be the Messiah, John answered all of them by saying, ‘I baptize you with water; but one who is more powerful than I is coming; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.’”

This is God’s word for God’s people. Thanks be to God. God bless the reading, hearing, and understanding of your word today. Let the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, my Rock and my Redeemer. Amen.

Peace be with you! You’ve heard this passage a few weeks ago, but now we’re looking at it from another angle. Today we’re going to be remembering our baptism. Unless you’ve been baptized in the last couple years, you’re probably thinking, “How could I remember my baptism I was only 6 months old?” The apostle Paul frequently said things like, “Remember the words . . .” or “Keep this in your remembrance.” Today we’ll be remembering God’s love and grace to us.

Baptism and Holy Communion are the two Protestant sacraments. You could say a sacrament is an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace. Baptism is God’s act, and it’s God’s initiative that brings us into a communing fellowship. When we become God’s, and God puts a stamp on us inwardly—the Holy Spirit; this is the sign, the seal, and the guarantee of our inheritance. We’ve

been given gifts and graces to use in the body of Christ, and as we work to discover them—we surrender them to God, and use them.

Baptism carries a powerful significance to the meaning of a person's spiritual journey. If we had a river nearby we could go down to the river and have an encounter with God. Instead, we'll have an encounter here that will prompt our spirit and mind to remember and be thankful for God's love and grace. We'll remember the water that cleanses from sin and washes us clean with the power of the Holy Spirit that draws us to God.

We're filled with expectation just as the crowd was when John the Baptist said that Jesus would "baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire." Baptism makes us new, and it gives us another start in life that ensures our success. People feel the weight of their sin when they recognize it and see a need for God in their lives. What we want God to do is what Luke said—to take the fire of the Holy Spirit and burn up the chaff that's in our lives—that dry useless stuff on the outside. Things like wrong attitudes or too much anger. What we need is more of God and less of us!

Jesus Christ was baptized in the river Jordan by John. He presents himself at the river in solidarity with us as humans. God takes the wrong stuff *we did and do and will do and* puts it all on Christ crucified so we might be made right with God. We're so hungry to do right by God and ourselves.

We can't see or always feel the love and grace that God continually pours down on us, so it's a good idea to remind ourselves how it surrounds and upholds us every moment of every day.

The great Protestant Martin Luther was plagued at times by a sense of unworthiness. He kept an inscription over his desk that read, "Remember, you've been baptized." He would touch his forehead and remind himself, "Martin, you've

been baptized.” God says in Isaiah 43; don’t fear, for I have redeemed you. God has called you by name and you’re mine! Christ has cleansed you, forgiven you, claimed you, and sealed you by God’s own Spirit and given you a brand new everlasting identity in Christ.

When we *are* baptized, God promises that the Holy Spirit will always be with us to help us and provide us with the strength we need. So what are we remembering when we come to the fount this morning to remember? We remember the love and grace God continually pours into our lives. We reaffirm our baptismal vows and remind ourselves of the ways we can be continually healed by Christ as we offer our hurts up to him. Wrong obsessions, wrong thinking, hurtful actions, divorce, the loss of a loved one—we thank God for his care and healing, and we remember what God is doing in our lives.

It’s good to remind ourselves *whose* we are and *who* we are. When we see bad things happening in the country and around the world—let’s remember, we’re God’s child, and Christ will never leave us. And if you’re struggling with something today, and you don’t see a way out or you worry how you’re going to make it through, use this reaffirmation of your baptism to know that God knows your name and loves you, and if you need to start over in life, God will be at your side strengthening you.

Let’s pray. Holy God who comes along side us and walks in solidarity with us, move in this place. Bring comfort, encouragement, and generate within us a passion for godliness. Pour out your grace, mercy, and love over us as we draw closer to you and remember whose we are and who we are. Amen.