

“Blessed to Serve”

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Matthew 3:13-17 Isaiah 42:1-9

Rev. Kimberly Heath
Wall Street United Church



This Sunday we look at the baptism of Jesus.

John, the cousin of Jesus, is preparing people for the message of Jesus. He is calling people to repent — to turn around and to see the nearness of the kingdom of God — and he is baptizing people as a sign of that repentance, a sign of that life turn-around. John’s baptism is one of repentance. So when Jesus goes out to John and asks to be baptized, John cries ‘ No way, José! ’Or maybe it was no way Jesús! What does Jesus need to repent from? What does Jesus need to turn around from so he can experience the kingdom of God? He is the Kingdom of God!

If repentance is turning from what is not fully the kingdom of God in order to stand firmly in the calling God has given us, clearly Jesus did not need to turn; but, perhaps it was important to him to confirm and be affirmed, and to stand firmly in that calling.

For Jesus this baptism becomes an act of confirmation or even ordination. Even today, baptism is about making a commitment. I love the Covenant Service that John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, wrote:

I AM NO LONGER MY OWN, BUT THINE
PUT ME TO WHAT THOU WILT, RANK ME WITH WHOM THOU WILT.
PUT ME TO DOING, PUT ME TO SUFFERING.
LET ME BE EMPLOYED FOR THEE OR LAID ASIDE FOR THEE.
LET ME HAVE ALL THINGS, LET ME HAVE NOTHING.
I FREELY AND HEARTILY YIELD ALL THINGS
TO THY PLEASURE AND DISPOSAL.
AND NOW, O GLORIOUS AND BLESSED GOD,
FATHER, SON, AND HOLY SPIRIT,
THOU ART MINE AND I AM THINE.

SO BE IT.
AND THE COVENANT WHICH I HAVE MADE ON EARTH,
LET IT BE RATIFIED IN HEAVEN.
AMEN.

-JOHN WESLEY

*I am no longer my own, but yours.
Put me to what you will, rank me with
whom you will;
put me to doing, put me to suffering;
let me be employed for you, or laid aside
for you,
exalted for you, or brought low for you;
let me be full, let me be empty, let me
have all things, let me have nothing:*

I freely and wholeheartedly yield all things to your pleasure and disposal. And now, glorious and blessed God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, you are mine and I am yours. So be it. And the covenant now made on earth, let it be ratified in heaven. Amen.

So Jesus steps into the water and insists on being baptized by John — partly to stand firmly and say yes to the call on his life.

As he does; the heavens open and Jesus sees the Holy Spirit descending on him and he hears and feels God's blessing on him.

It's very important to note that Jesus hasn't done anything yet. Jesus has not done anything of worth: he has not graduated from high school, he hasn't performed any miracles, he has not even been tested – that comes next when he goes to the desert for 40 days.

Jesus hears the message that he is beloved before he *does* anything. Don't you think God should have waited to find out if Jesus was going to be successful in his life mission? What if he fails? What if he says no to the cross?



I've been watching the Star Wars TV show called The Mandalorian.

As with all Star Wars movies, there are the humans and there are the droids. The droids are of course not remotely human. They work in black and white, and if they are given a mission, they are not concerned about any moral quandaries. If a droid were given the mission to go to earth and teach about the kingdom of God and then be killed on a cross it would be no great hardship – they are robots. Interestingly the Mandalorian, despite his robotic appearance and his incredibly monotone voice, is very human and has little use for droids.

Jesus was not a droid. He was human – fully human and fully divine. He could have failed the temptation in the desert; he could have escaped from the Garden of Gethsemane before the arrest and avoided the cross. It's the fact that he was fully human and fully divine that makes the sacrifice on the cross such an act of unconditional love.

As Jesus stood confirming and preparing for his call I believe he needed to hear those words of affirmation: "This is my beloved son, in whom I am delighted!" He needed to hear that he was loved.

I learned on Facebook this past week that the term "*Put Up*" for adoption originated from the Orphan Train Movement that went from the 1850's to the 1930's.



During that time homeless and orphaned children from the big cities of the east (like New York, maybe Toronto too, I'm not sure) were put on trains and sent to the west, to the country and auctioned off to landowners, farmers and

anyone else who needed help with manual labour. The train would stop in many small towns — the auction of children was advertised before they arrived — and when the train pulled up, the children were literally “put up” on a community stage to perform or be inspected. It was often a whole lot closer to slavery than to being loved and chosen.

Sometimes when we think about standing in God's presence, we think that God wants to judge us and test our worth. Though God knows all about us, when we take a stand and say “Here I am, send me” we are not ‘put up’ and inspected for our worth. Instead, we are adopted in the good sense of that word: specially chosen and cherished, blessed and empowered.

What a start to the New Year we've had! I'm sure I'm not alone in finding these past few weeks disturbing with the devastating wildfires in Australia and the incredibly volatile situation between the United States and Iran. Canadians were directly affected with the passenger plane being shot down in Tehran. We used to just watch or listen to the 6 o'clock news but now it's all around us, 24 hours a day and 7 days a week.

Even on low news days where the biggest thing we have to worry about is Harry and Meghan wanting out of the Royal spotlight and what Canadian city they will move to; even then the news has a way of churning up anxiety. On top of a turbulent world you have your own worries and concerns, your health, your relationships, your security and finances and just getting back to routine and tackling a mountain of work that everyone puts off in the month of December and wants done at the beginning of January. It's a turbulent life.

I believe Jesus needed the affirmation and the blessing of baptism to face a turbulent life and a turbulent world. He needed that moment to face the demons inside — demons that would soon question his identity with: “If you really are the son of God, turn this rock into bread!” Almost all of us battle internally with self-doubt, with worries, and guilt. In the desert Jesus did too. And, I don't doubt that Jesus needed to remember his baptism as

he went out to face the demons in the world: like the religious leaders who were more interested in power, popularity and legalism than in love and justice; like his fear-filled followers who were so slow to see and to hear; like the constant political threat that the Roman occupation and rulers like Herod kept them under. But through all of the internal and external turmoil, Jesus stood firm. How? It probably helped that he was God, and didn't have the stumbling blocks of sin in his life. But even more he stood firm with love, with justice, and with the kingdom of heaven because he never forgot who he was and whose he was.

If we have any hope of having peace and strength to face the day, if we have any hope of sharing the love of Jesus and making a difference, we too need to stand in those waters and feel the blessing, the presence and the power of God filling us and sending us out.

I don't doubt that later on in his ministry Jesus would go back in his mind to that day, standing in the waters of the Jordan River ready to take on his call, with the sun shining on his face ... but more importantly with the Holy Spirit and the words of blessing from God filling him from the tips of his feet to the top of his head. Standing there, he knew he was not alone and he could fulfill his call no matter how difficult. May it be so with us.



This morning we are going to do a “Ritual of Remembering our Baptism”.

1. We will start with an act of repentance of turning from what is not filling us with life but instead brings harm to ourselves and/or to those around us — knowingly or unknowingly. We will turn from harm and destruction to life and wholeness.
2. Then in your pew I will invite you to an act of commitment.
3. Then I will invite you to walk forward and to dip your fingers in the water. This might be a remembering of your baptism. Or, if you have never been baptized, a blessing. You might make the sign of the cross on your forehead.

4. Then pick up a piece of paper from the basket beside the bowl of water. There are several different verses of scripture to bless or encourage you in your walk. Take it home. Read it and remember.
5. Return to your pew and listen to what God is saying.

