

Dry Off...There's Work to Do
Luke 3:15-16, 21-22
First Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)
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Do you remember your baptism? Or, if you were baptized as an infant, do you remember hearing about it?

If so, what is it that you remember?

I remember the class we did with my pastor, Doug, as we prepared to be baptized. I specifically remember things I learned then about who we are as the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). Although I took Disciples History and Polity in seminary, in some ways my baptism class was my first Disciples history class.

I also remember jokes told over pizza one day when the class participants were eating together.

I remember going through the process of baptism with other young people. Specifically I think of Joy and Jeff, who I had attended every Sunday School class and Vacation Bible School week with since we were preschoolers.

I remember the excitement of the day itself. And, let's be honest, as a 13-year-old girl, that excitement was both about being baptized - something I was legitimately eager for - and my excitement was also about getting a new dress to celebrate that day.

Additionally, I remember what was common at that time in history - that my baptism day was also the first time I took communion. And although in my adulthood I am a big advocate for children taking communion as young as possible rather than waiting until after baptism, I do remember what a big deal it was that day when I first got to participate in communion.

Over my years of ministry I have heard all sorts of stories about people's baptisms.

A friend of mine tells about his father making him get baptized because that made him a member of the church and his father wanted him to vote in their upcoming congregational meeting. He wanted him to vote *against* a proposed building project.

My mom tells the story of her older brother's baptism and how shocked she was the following day when he still picked on her. She thought he was supposed to be better than that now!

I've known a number of people who were baptized in creeks or rivers that hadn't yet warmed up from an Iowa winter; and I've baptized kids in an indoor baptistery where the water felt nearly that cold.

I often tell the story of an over-eager young man who nearly dove into the water, splashing the choir in the process.

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Today we heard the story of Jesus' baptism. What did you notice?

Did you notice that his was only one of many baptisms that John was doing?

Did you notice the people's confusion about who John was? Or maybe you noticed John's own clarity about who he was not?

Did you notice the unusual happenings - the heavens being opened, the Spirit descending like a dove, a voice claiming and naming Jesus' identity?

At this time every year it is traditional for those of us in the church to again hear Jesus' baptism story. In many ways that simply fits with the pattern of the church year and allows us to move forward from the birth narrative to his adult ministry. And yet, I don't think we hear it only because it makes for a good transition story.

Rather, pausing with Jesus' moment of baptism - and with our own - is a good practice for us. It is a good reminder. It is a good chance to reset our lives and to realign ourselves with who we claim to follow and who we claim to be. It is a good chance to remember not only God's claim on Jesus, but on each of us as well.

But, one thing I am aware of is that too often we tell our baptism stories and they seem to end the moment we step out of the water. And we often tell Jesus' baptism story that way, too. We read this passage and we end with the voice from heaven. And at that point we think we're done talking about his baptism.

But what happens if we remember that when these stories were originally written, they weren't neatly broken up into weekly readings to help preachers prepare sermons? They didn't originally have the chapter and verse markings that all of us are used to. Those are helpful tools for people of faith and for church leaders. But when these stories were originally told and then written down, the people were more often hearing them together, as one continuous narrative.

So, what happens if we don't tuck our Bibles away the moment the voice of God speaks from the heavens, but instead keep reading?

See, the very next verse, not considered part of the baptism story, actually tells us a lot about baptism. It reads, "Jesus was about thirty years old when he began his work" (Luke 3:23, NRSV).

Friends, baptism is an important experience. It is a valuable ritual of faith. And it is not an end in itself. Rather, baptism is a public proclamation of God claiming us and us claiming God. It is, at least within traditions like ours that embrace believers' baptism, it is a chance for people to affirm their desire to follow Jesus and to live lives that reflect his values.

Here at First Christian, we have taken to asking those being baptized three questions.

The first is the traditional question of baptism. It is a belief question. Since baptism is a particularly Christian ritual, it is a question about Jesus. Do you believe in Jesus as Christ, son of our living God, and do you seek to follow him as Savior and Lord?

The other two questions - they really get to the heart of action. They are really about what happens after baptism.

So, the second question we ask is this: Do you covenant to turn away from injustice and everything that would separate you from God *and* do you turn toward God, the source of love, and to Jesus as a guide for how God would have you live, loving and serving your neighbor?

That question asks if we commit to orienting our lives toward God and then living in ways that reflect that orientation.

And the final question we ask is one that recognizes that we live our faith best in community. So, this is the question of joining the church. Do you desire to be part of this community as together we strive to follow Jesus?

So that next verse, the one that isn't traditionally included in the story of Jesus' baptism, the one that says that he was about thirty years old when he began his work. That really is about his baptism. It reminds us that Jesus didn't get baptized and then stop what he was doing. He didn't get baptized and sit back without a care for the world because in baptism he had been saved and no longer had to worry about anything.

Rather his baptism became the point where his public ministry began. In many ways, baptism was the on ramp to the work that he would continue throughout his life.

The same is true for us.

Too often baptism has been treated as a way to get our names onto the rolls of the church or of heaven. But at its best baptism is a moment of commitment when we are reminded that we are beloved children of God and that we have work to do in this world, work that is about bringing God's realm in its fullness.

We might be able to name the date of our baptism...the date when water was sprinkled or poured over our heads, or in our tradition, the day we were immersed. But that date is not an ending. Rather it is merely a beginning.

For when we come out of the water, if we listen closely, we will hear a voice say, "Dry off...there's work to do." For in baptism we are invited to follow Jesus and in doing so to make a difference in the world.

May it be so.