

Meditation Our Baptism...Our Identity. Pastor Riva Tabelism

Please join me in prayer.

Hide me in your glory, gracious and loving God. And may the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to you, my redeemer, and my refuge. Amen.

Good morning! We are once again reading about a passage that looks like a movie. Unlike the other stories that we saw that are movie-worthy in the life of Jesus, this passage is a very fast-paced movie. One minute, Jesus is being baptized by his cousin John, as he is coming out of the water, the heavens torn apart, and a voice was validating his identity. In one blink he is in the wilderness, staying there for forty days, being tempted by Satan, being with the wild beasts and being waited by the angels. One more blink, and his cousin is being arrested and he went to Galilee. It's like one of those action-packed movies where there is a lot of movement. At the top of my head, this reminds me of movies like the Fast and the Furious or Mission Impossible. There are not much dialogues – much as expected in the writing of the author of the gospel of Mark. Every time I read the gospel Mark – I feel like I am watching a fast movie, not unlike the other gospels – Matthew, Luke and John. It was fascinating to me to learn from seminary that Mark is most likely one of the sources of Matthew and Luke.

Once again, we are hearing of the baptism of Jesus, and like any other baptism narrative, there is the supernatural occurrence with the heavens, the Spirit coming upon or descending on him in different forms, but the most distinctive form is the dove. Maybe we can talk about that one of these days. And then a voice, validating the identity of Jesus. In Matthew 3:17, Jesus was identified by the voice as the son and introduced him. In Luke 3:22, it has an element of intimacy because it showed that the voice explicitly identified Jesus as the son. While in John 1:34, it was a story that is being told by John the Baptist, or the cousin of Jesus. In all of the gospels except Mark, there were some sort of pushback from John when Jesus came to him to be baptized. John the baptizer's major reason is this, the baptism that he was calling for people to do was part of the repentance that John was calling for people to do, and Jesus, being a righteous man, and need not to repent, wanted to be baptized.

In my past sermon about baptism, I discussed that baptism is the outward manifestation of God's grace. We consider this as a form of prevenient grace, the grace that is offered to us whether we accept it or not. My professor uses an analogy of God's grace as being in a house – where prevenient grace is an invitation for a person to go inside the house from the porch, justifying grace is the invitation to into the front room and the sanctifying grace is God's invitation for us to physically move from the front room to the bedroom, a place of respite, of comfort, and with other responsibilities being part of the household. Additionally, baptism allows us to be identified as God's children and be in community with our siblings in God's family. This is the reason why we, in the UMC baptize infants and anyone else who would like to be in community with us and with God. We do not have any limitations of age, race, gender, sexual orientation and even gender identity and expression. We welcome all without conditions. If you don't remember this, it is fine. To be honest, sometimes, I don't remember them all of the time. So, we are in this together.

Let's circle back to the reflection of the baptism. In the church calendar, baptism of Jesus is usually talked about after the Advent Season. It is very rare that I/we talk about the baptism narrative during the Lent. But as we continue this journey of the way of the cross, this is also an invitation for us to revisit our baptism, and as we do that, we go back to our identity as God's children. As we find our identity, may this empower us to continue to be the hands and the feet of God to share the love to the world. Let us remember that our baptism is our identity as God's children, and this should encourage and empower us to embody God's love not only during the Lenten Season but always. May it be so. Amen.