

January 11 2015

Scripture Lessons ~

Psalm 29

Acts 19:1-7

Mark 1:4-11

Sermon *A Life Changing Experience*

Little Laurie's Sunday School class had been decorated the previous Sunday with the crèche and all those wonderful reminders of the Christmas season but this Sunday Laurie entered her classroom, still remembering Christmas, yet all the things were different as she still recalled the baby Jesus and the whole Christmas story. In looking at a picture of the adult Jesus on the bulletin board she asked the teacher, "Who is that guy?" And the teacher replied, "Laurie, that is Jesus" Laurie shook her head and said, "Man, he sure grew up fast." It's a strange thing in this season because we are in the season of Epiphany when we celebrate the story of the Wise Men and the gifts which they bring to the baby Jesus and then we make this shift into today's lesson which presents Jesus as a grown man baptized by John the Baptist in the Jordan River.

And thinking about Jesus' baptism which we were speaking with the younger ones about, I was thinking as I was reflected that there are a lot of experiences which change the direction of our lives; that determine our attitude for the future for the better or for the worse. And maybe you can as I attempted to get the guys and girls to do, think of some of these from your past history, experiences which were absolutely crucial to the person that you are today maybe you can think of great friends, or a graduation or purchasing your first house, business or a class you took or a person who said something really that affected your life, a trip you took, a book you read, a church service that meant something to you or on that more difficult side an illness or accident that might have happened that changed your attitude or changed the course of your life.

I think that Jesus had such an experience as I said before in his baptism. I think his baptism was a turning point in his life. I think it is the key in fact to understanding his whole ministry for those three years that followed. When Jesus came to John to be baptized; John was surprised; he did not understand what was happening. Jesus was probably John's cousin and may have in fact been one of John's followers as well. Jesus' baptism has puzzled for centuries the people in the church because they think of Jesus' baptism as the baptism for the forgiveness of sins but Jesus was lead to John for something far beyond that. So we have to look at other reasons why Jesus came to be baptized. For 30 years Jesus had waited patiently in Nazareth and his parents had hints all along the way about a kind of

special status in his life. And we have gone through some of those stories his birth, his dedication in the temple, visit of the magi, his flight to Egypt, the time when he was found in the temple when he was 12 years old, but now the time, the time had arrived. Yet never in the history had a Jewish person been in a sense baptized. Baptism wasn't called by that name but for converts entering in Judaism from some other religion, there was some kind of ritual cleansing in preparation for becoming a Jewish person. But for now the very first time in history many of Jewish people began to see the relationship to God in a new kind of way. In a desire to follow in Jesus footsteps and so he would identify with them by going down into the river Jordan River by their side. Jesus whole ministry after this was in fact consistent with this act. He did not stand aloft from imperfect human beings but instead he even accepted their hospitality. And something happened at Jesus' baptism that was so important. He heard a voice from heaven say, "This is beloved son with him or with you I am well pleased."

And here, I think the significance of his baptism becomes clear for us. It was now in a sense, Jesus designated as the Son of God In my mind, and it was a kind of ordination that from here on his ministry would be one of service to others. It would lead inevitably to suffering; it would inevitable to a complete identification with us as human beings. The commentator, William Barkley on his commentator on Matthew said, "In that moment, it was set before Jesus both his task and also, the way of fulfilling of that task.

I had a man in my last parish who asked an interesting question as a result of hearing this story about Jesus. Well, his first question, "Was he crazy?" "Was he a masochistic in getting himself killed in the end?" Well I suppose to some it might appear so but the events of Jesus' baptism, I think showed an active point in his life to die was his task. And he knew who he was and more importantly he knew what he had to do to fulfill God's plan for his life.

Let's shift gears a little bit and look inward for a moment. Let us ask ourselves what it means for us as followers of Jesus to be baptized. For one thing it does not mean that we will know all the answers to all the great religious questions that there are in the world. Some years ago the great German theologian Helmet Thielke served as a professor at the University of Hamburg in Germany and after his lecture one day, a student who was searching for the meaning of baptism for his own life asked how he justify the baptism of infants. To this Helmet replied baptism is a sign that God reaches out to us from the very beginning of life, long before we are able to respond to God. Our relationship with God does not depend upon us alone but ultimately our relationship with God depends on God. Have you ever thought that the Sacraments involve some of the most common actions of life, baptism is washing, Communion is eating a meal and yet when we do these things in the context of worship they take on a special meaning? We are identified

in a special way to eternal life of God in these things. When God's spirit brings us to a decision to follow Jesus or when parents bring us for baptism and we affirm faith in our time of confirmation. First of all this is the beginning of a new and abundant life for us, the symbolism is important for in baptism by emersion, we die to the past and rise to the new direction in life, in sprinkling or pouring it is in represented a new beginning as well a cleansing and a fresh start into a new way of life.

Secondly we are no longer then another part of God's creation but instead we see ourselves as special children that God called us to be. God so wants us to be fulfilled both in this life and also in the life to come, but God entered our reality in a new exciting way as we come before God in baptism.

But the third step I think is just as important as all the others for if Jesus had stopped at these two, we as a people of faith would have stopped as well. He did not and we cannot stop. Baptism then must be active and like Jesus, God sends us forth into service in the larger world. When you and I have been baptized and have been growing into mature Christians and the pattern of our life must be one of being involved with the world and involved the world's people. You know some Christians in the past thought the world was so bad and so evil that they needed to escape into the desert and get away from it altogether. But Jesus did just the opposite because after his baptism and after his temptations in the desert he became involved. Nothing and nobody was too wicket for Jesus and through him God's power was for work changing and transforming our human situation which even the Pharisee would not touch with a ten foot pole. The world out there today has need for you and it has a need for every Christian person to get involved; to get involved in a world of business and labor, of politics and government, pollution and ecology, involved in a world that is unstable from the horrors of war that is all around us.

6 year old Kenny gave his grandmother a Bible for her birthday that he himself had taken the time to choose. He knew that a person write something special in the flyleaf of the book when it is given as a gift. So he carefully copied what was written in the flyleaf of one of his father's books in his father's library although he really didn't know what he was writing at the time. So his grandmother was surprise when she opened her new Bible which read- like this with the compliments and best wishes of the author. He didn't quite get it.

In Mark's Gospel lesson for today, Mark tells us that after Jesus Baptism, the heavens were in a sense torn apart and a connection was made between the heavens and the earth. And our baptism God extends the compliments of the author of our life and best wishes for our life and the life of the whole world.

So remember that baptism is not some kind of magic or on the other hand just some outward sign. Instead baptism represents the inward working of God's Holy

Spirit in each of our lives but that sign, that symbolism is important to us in that it remind us first of all the new life that we have in Jesus and secondly a sign we are set aside as God's precious children and third that we are sent for a purpose into God's world as a result. God in a sense will open heaven and speaks to us as well if we are like Jesus are willing to listen and to answer God's call.

And together we say AMEN.