

Pentecost 4C 2010
Luke 8:26-39, Galatians 3:23-29
Sermon for Advent LC
June 20th, 2010

“Baptize! Why?”

Dear sisters and brothers, grace to you and peace from God the Father and our risen Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Today is a special day for us as a community of faith. We (at the 10) will celebrate the baptism of one of our younger members of this community. As the faith community we will stand here and speak words of hope and promise to Max Oliver Stowe. He will be marked with the cross of Christ- he will be sealed by the Holy Spirit and he will be welcomed into this community in a way that many others have been in the past and more will in the future. We will baptize him, we will lift him up to God and seek God’s ultimate blessing in a public way upon his life- not just as it relates to the church but also as it relates to the world. And you- (even though you won’t necessarily be there at 10) are part of it-- you are part of God’s creative and redemptive work, you are part of this community by being here today, you are part of the story that Max Oliver will know. You see, above all- this act of Baptism that we will participate in is about community and identity. Community- as in the church, the body of Christ embracing one another in the name of Christ. And identity- as in Max’s identity as a child of God- and your identity as a child of God and the collision of those identities together. Today, is a special day- but why do we do it? Why do we feel it necessary to baptize as part of our tradition? Why go through the motions?

I was telling someone this week that we had a baptism at church and it would be a good time for them to visit if they were interested. In response, he asked similar questions to the ones I just raised- why do it? Why do you baptize- why go through motions without any reason? I talked him through the reasons I guess why we do it- gave him Lutheranism 101 and he might have been okay with it. But I kept wondering- why do we do it? And sure I can know the reasons, I mean that’s my business but what about you- do you know what baptism is about? Do you know why we do it? In pondering those questions I realized that what I want to cling to is not so much the theological doctrinal explanation but the real reason- why do it- why is there a need- what matters... And that’s where we are at- trying to make sense of this holy act which will take place in a way that concretely matters to Max and all those that have been and will be baptized and also matters to you- the community- the ones here today. Today is a special day- a day when something remarkable will happen- an innocent child of God will be baptized by really what does it matter Why even do it?

With those questions in mind let us turn to the readings for today. I tend to think that the word of God for us today is perfect for us to consider as we think about Max and baptism and life in Christ together. Hear these words from Paul in his writing to the Galatians- **“For in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith. As many of you were baptized into Christ have clothed yourself with Christ”** Paul continues to express his claim that in Christ we are all one- we have no separation- all are welcome, all are claimed all are determined worthy because of What Jesus has done for us and because of the power that Christ gives to us in our new identity. That is precisely what we celebrate in Baptism- a new identity, the promise of an ever present God- the hope of better things because of our savior. Think about that a little more- you are clothed with Christ- you have put on Christ- that means all that you are all that you have- all that you will be starts and ends with Christ- there is not much better than that. And that is what we claim and proclaim in baptism- but again I wonder why do we need that assurance...that promise...that hope?

I think the reason lies in our existence and our brokenness and our Gospel for today paints a good picture about the need that we have. Now...I’m not saying we are all demonics by any means but what I am saying is that just as the Gerasenes demonic was overcome by a dark existence called Legion we too struggle to free ourselves out of traps and identity that hinders our growth and our life- our progression

to where God calls us and our ability to live for the Kingdom of God. And what we see in this amazing story is the need for us to be claimed by a God who loves us and promises to take us somewhere new. Let's look at the story briefly- Jesus encounters this man who had demons- and he begins to talk to him. He asks him his name and in the response of the man we see the crux of why I think what I think what baptism celebrates is so important. The man, used to being held in shackles because of the suffering he faced says, "I am Legion"- because a Legion- many- demons had entered him. His identity was completely and utterly overcome by what had assailed him- he could be and was not anything but a sick, demonic man- where he had not other existence. And then Christ comes to him- and we know what happens- Jesus sends the demons away- into the poor pigs- and this man is completely free. Jesus moves him from legion- from one possessed – from one overcome by hopelessness and grief and despair to one clothed with Christ...one with a new name- that of redeemed and saved...that of child of God marked by the touch of Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit. That is why we baptize...that is why we proclaim those promises.

Sure...we might not have demons, we might not even be a little down in life- now...but the reality is that our world, our identity, our brokenness pulls us in many different directions and has the power to pull us away from the only identity that matters- that of beloved child of God- that of one who has put on Christ. So friends...this day is a good day, a day when we celebrate the baptism of one our littlest members and a day when you- wherever you are- can come to Christ and hear his promise that you have him- that he is with you- that he loves you and calls you to go with him and to claim your new existence. Put on Christ, dear friends and lose the baggage, the hurt, the pain- wear Christ and live boldly.

God loves you and so do I. Amen.