

Worship Service “*Beloved*”

Pentecost 16, Sunday, Baptism - Year A

17th September 2023

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

Baptism A

Prelude

Opening Music (video) [*Take Me To The Water*](#)

performed by Robert Buyers and the Susquehanna Chorale

arranged by Alice Parker, from the album *Wondrous Love*, licensed by Naxos Digital Services US, Inc (on behalf of Mark Records), posted to YouTube by Susquehanna Chorale

Welcome Guests / Announcements

Pass the Peace

Opening Hymn *Come, Let Us All Unite to Sing - 12*

Call to Worship [responsive]

One: God called you in righteousness, taking you by the hand;

All: God has given us a covenant, and made us a light to all people.

One: God called you to bring out those who dwell in darkness;

All: For the Lord is our God, and God’s glory is given to us.

One: See, the former things have come to pass, and God declares new things:

All: Before they spring forth, God speaks them to us.

One: Come, worship God, who makes all things new:

All: Worship God, who is with us in the journey of life.

Invocation

God Who Speaks, speak to us in a new way, that we might listen for Your call above the noise of the world.

Cry out to us, that we would hear the call of justice amidst the distractions of daily life. Sing out to us, that we would hear Your music and feel Your rhythm against the despairing notes that drag us down.

Whisper to us, that we would hear the words of Your steadfast love spoken softly and tenderly in our hearts.

Call our names. Speak to us, O God, and help us to learn Your words, Your rhythm, Your song. Amen.

Words of the Prophet: Isaiah 42:1-9 NRSVUE

Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights; I have put my spirit upon him; he will bring forth justice to the nations.

He will not cry out or lift up his voice or make it heard in the street;

a bruised reed he will not break, and a dimly burning wick he will not quench; he will faithfully bring forth justice.

He will not grow faint or be crushed until he has established justice in the earth, and the coastlands wait for his teaching.

Thus says God, the LORD, who created the heavens and stretched them out, who spread out the earth and what comes from it, who gives breath to the people upon it and spirit to those who walk in it:

I am the LORD; I have called you in righteousness; I have taken you by the hand and kept You; I have given you as a covenant to the people a light to the nations, to open the eyes that are blind, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon, from the prison those who sit in darkness.

I am the LORD; that is my name; my glory I give to no other, nor my praise to idols.

See, the former things have come to pass, and new things I now declare; before they spring forth, I tell you of them.

A Time of Prayer

Joys and Concerns

Pastoral Prayer (resources)

God who shows no partiality, show your favoritism on all your people. Send forth your justice for all to see. Save us your people. Empower us to preach and testify to your great love and mercy.

God who makes and keeps covenant with your people, You called us to be a light to the nations, to open the eyes that are blind, to set the prisoners free, Help us to answer your call that these things come to pass.

God of grace and glory, We pray for those who suffer from pains and sorrows. We pray for those whose hearts are broken. We pray for those whose families are fractured. We pray for those whose lives are ravaged by war. We pray for those who struggle with poverty, and starvation

We pray for our brother and sisters in Christ who are being martyred and tortured for their beliefs.

Thank you for hearing our prayers. Thank you for pouring out your Spirit on your son and pouring your spirit out on us too. May we too hear you say to us this day that “This is my son, my daughter, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased.” Amen

Hymn *Spirit of God! Descend* **502**

Gospel Reading: Matthew 3:13-17 NRSVUE

Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan, to be baptized by him.

John would have prevented him, saying, “I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?”

But Jesus answered him, “Let it be so now, for it is proper for us in this way to fulfill all righteousness.” Then he consented.

And when Jesus had been baptized, just as he came up from the water, suddenly the heavens were opened to him and he saw God’s Spirit descending like a dove and alighting on him.

And a voice from the heavens said, “This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased.”

Message - Beloved

There is the story of a formerly homeless man named Mario who now lived in a church shelter. He had lived on the streets of New York City for half of his life. He spent his sixtieth birthday with friends at a church dinner at the shelter. Several people at the dinner claimed that Mario did not appear to be sixty years old. Responding to this comment, Mario reached into his coat pocket to produce his birth certificate, which showed that he was indeed sixty years old. Mario then said, “Want to see my baptismal certificate?” His baptismal certificate showed that he was baptized as a baby at an Episcopal church on the Lower East Side of Manhattan. What a remarkable thing! Why would Mario have carried his baptismal certificate with him for all those years as he wandered the streets of Manhattan? One could certainly understand keeping a vital identification document such as his birth certificate close, but what made the baptismal certificate so important to him?

In our gospel text this morning, Jesus comes to the Jordan River to be baptized by John the Baptist. John protests saying, “I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?” Our text is clear that John says this because he does not want to assume a superior position to Jesus. Then Jesus responds, “Let it be so now; for it is proper for us in this way to fulfill all righteousness.”

We may wonder why Jesus is so insistent on being baptized. One clue is in the wording of his response. Jesus responds with authority, saying, “Let it be so now. He follows this up

with an explanation of why John needs to baptize him, to “fulfill all righteousness.” This is the fifth time in the short span of Matthew's Gospel to this point that the verb “fulfill” has been used. As I've talked about before, there is a very heavy connection in Matthew in demonstrating how Jesus is the fulfillment of the promises of the Old Testament prophets, particularly Isaiah. But more importantly, it's just not the concept of a messiah arriving, but of the One who will accomplish God's will and plan for humanity.

Too often we make many of these concepts, such as righteousness, to be issues of our own personal piety. We focus on our own behavior, or look at an upstanding person and say “this person or that was a righteous woman or man,” based on how their morals were reflected in their lives. And don't get me wrong, that's important and part of being righteous. But it's so much more than just personal piety.

The Greek word, *diakaios* from which it is derived also means justice, the way things were meant to be, more specifically, as planned by God, God's will. So Jesus, in saying that he needed to be baptized by John, was also acting justly, and fulfilling God's plan. If we were to look at all the scriptures in Isaiah and the prophets referenced in Matthew concerning Jesus, we would find that many of them have the theme of setting things back to the way God intended, or restoring God's justice to the world.

Baptism is a lot like a wedding ring. Baptism is symbolic of the washing away of our sins. It is also symbolic of a new way of life. It has been said that Baptism is to the Christian faith what the wedding ring is to a marriage. It is a symbol. Like the wedding ring, baptism draws a mark on the ground between the past and the future. Like the wedding ring, it says, "From this day forward, I stand with God." Another, and perhaps more important clue to the answer of the question as to why it was so important to Jesus to be baptized is in the next section of our text.

Right after Jesus was baptized, “suddenly the heavens were opened to him and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, ‘This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased.’” The baptism of Jesus reveals his identity to us, and to Jesus as well. Jesus is the beloved Son of God. This identity must give him comfort as he carries out his ministry, defending himself from those who question his message and actions. This voice must bolster him as he is later declared a criminal and crucified. Others declare him a liar and a heretic. God declares him to be God's beloved Son.

For many of us, we take our understanding of baptism from this text. We understand that through God's grace, we stand alongside Jesus as God declares, “This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased.” We identify as children, as beloved daughters and sons of the Divine. Through this identity of grace, we experience our own value, and are motivated to see and proclaim all people to be children whom God loves.

Sadly, the reality is, as we grow, we can lose track of that heavenly voice, and we begin to listen to other voices. Perhaps we hear voices when we are children through report cards

that tells us we're not smart enough. Perhaps we hear the voices of our peers that tell us we're not cool enough, that our identity and how we express ourselves is somehow terribly flawed. While much awareness has been raised to the harm bullying can cause, it's still alive and well today. As adults, we hear voices that tell us that we are not successful enough or that we do not have enough money and all that money can buy. We often hear voices through our culture and unkind media that our bodies are not attractive enough.

Somehow as God's voice gets drowned out, we listen to those other voices, and we are tempted to forget who we are. We are tempted to forget that God and God's people have claimed us as beloved children of God. We can also be tempted to forget that God has claimed all people as beloved children. There are times when we forget this identity in others, as when we encounter the homeless, perceive others as unattractive, or interact with those we feel are less than ideal, or less than *our* ideal. There are just as many voices that will try to drown out the Divine to make us think less of the "others" around us: others who struggle with substance abuse, others who struggle with a different orientation than our own, others who don't meet up to those standards of beauty and success the voices of our culture hold out as the ideal.

We can imagine our friend Mario, living on the streets for those thirty years. Passersby must have called him many things: a bum, homeless, panhandler, worthless. People avoided him and tried not to look at him, something we are probably all guilty of at some point. We have all watched as people like Mario are declared to be undeserving by our society and our government. Because we had a different experience than those we see as less, we formulate our own impressions on what must be at fault in them. We lose God's voice with God's perspective, and lose our beloved point of view. We forget the part our voice may have played in adding to that chorus that derides others, or the lack of our voice rising to lift them up as the divine beloved children they are.

We need to remember those times when we lost touch with our own status, when those voices drowned out the divine in our own lives. Even as others, through their actions and words declared Mario to be worthless, he carried his baptismal certificate and his birth certificate in his pocket. His birth certificate recalled his parents who named him out of love. His baptismal certificate recalled the God and congregation who loved and claimed him. Here he was, sixty years later, sitting in a church and having dinner with his friends. A congregation had once again acknowledged Mario's true identity, claimed him as one of their own, a beloved child of God, and extended their love and care.

As we walk through our days and hear others judge us, we need to remember God's voice at Jesus' baptism. As we hear ourselves disparaging others, whether aloud or in our own heads, we need to focus to listen for that heavenly voice that we would drown out, saying "you are my child, my beloved, with whom I am well pleased."

As we ourselves baptize today, and formally welcome new children of God to our flock, may we also be that same voice shared with others, as we see ALL as beloved by God. Amen.

Service of Baptism

Introduction Kiausherae Jones, Autajhanae Lewis,
 Shannon Williams, Cynthia Laudermilk

Today you are being formally received into this community of faith and into the Church of the Brethren. As part of the whole church of Jesus Christ, we offer you our rich heritage and invite you to share fully in our life and mission.

As you are received into the Olympic View Community Church of the Brethren, we intend to be a true family of faith to you. We commit ourselves to be for you a loving fellowship, to be a means of grace in your life, and to offer opportunities for worship, study, and service. One of the happiest times in our life as a church is when we can welcome new members to our fellowship. We welcome you with joy.

A Call to Serve

Just as the waters of the earth are abundant and full of life, so are the blessings God pours upon us daily. Let us now joyfully offer our gifts and offerings with the hope that they may enable others to feel immersed in God's love.

As we listen to the following interlude, let's reflect on how we can lean into baptism ourselves, seeing ourselves and others as the beloved children of God we are. After Annie has finished the interlude, please join together in the first verse of #516, Just as I am. After each baptism, you will join together in the next verse of that hymn.

A Time for Reflection - *Musical Interlude*

Hymn *Just as I am, without one plea (v. 1)* 516

Rite of Baptism

(congregation sings subsequent verses of Hymn 516 between candidates) (resources)

Pastor: Do you believe in Jesus Christ as the revealer of God's love and purpose for the world?

Candidate: I do

Pastor: Will you repent of sin, accept God's forgiveness, and live by the teachings of Jesus?

Candidate: I will

Pastor: Will you be a faithful member of this congregation, receiving our support and prayers, and giving yourself freely to us?

Candidate: I will

Candidate's name, upon your confession of faith made before God and these people, you are baptized in the name of God the Creator (immerse), Jesus Christ the Redeemer (immerse), and the Holy Spirit the Sustainer (immerse)

Prayer of Thanksgiving and Blessing

O God, we are thankful for the commitment made today **by *candidate's name***. May she experience your forgiveness, acceptance, and peace. Send your Holy Spirit upon her to guide and to empower. Enable her to walk in newness of life, using her gifts in praise to you and in service to others. Through Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.

Hymn ***Just As I Am, Without One Plea (v. 6)***

Congregational Welcome (in unison)

With joy we receive you as part of this congregation.

With you we renew and reaffirm our vows of faith.

We promise to surround you with the love and encouragement that will enable you to grow strong in compassion, vigorous in service, and sure in the way of Christ.

Benediction

May the blessing of God be upon all who have been witness to and made new and renewed commitments this day. And may we go forth together in service, glorifying God's name and responding to our neighbors' needs. Amen.

Postlude (video)

[Baptism](#)

Kenny Chesney and Randy Travis,

posted to YouTube by Ninsta2008