

**Message: Well-loved Children**

**What does baptism mean to you?**

For many of us, it doesn't mean much. Most people are baptized as infants and don't remember anything about the time. We were present. We most certainly reacted, whether by smiling, crying or squirming around. We missed the sacredness, the holiness of the moment. Our parents and godparents (or sponsors) experienced a joyful moment when we were introduced to the community. We were publically introduced to those who follow Jesus throughout their lives.

For those who were baptized when they were older or as adults, or who participated in a confirmation class, there are different memories of baptism. Baptism was a conscious choice. We chose to publically speak about our faith. We acknowledged Jesus as our Lord and Savior. Many of us became full fledged members of the church then.

**In the short time we have today, I want to explore the meaning of Jesus' baptism and how it plays a part in our life today.**

**Jesus' baptism is a remarkable event!** It's important not just in the life of Jesus and the life of John the Baptist, but in the lives of everyone who has ever lived.

**Reach out and touch someone next to you.** That connection is real. It's part of our baptism, for we're connected together through the true vine, Jesus Christ. That's what John Wesley called social holiness. When we gather together, God's present is a very real, holy and practical way. We become the means by which others give and receive grace.

**Baptism is one of the two sacraments of the Church.** Sacrament means several things: solemn oath, sacred mystery and means of grace are examples.

**The origins of baptism seem to be related to the acts required by Jewish priests.** They were required to perform a symbolic cleansing in water before and after performing their duties. Leviticus 16:4 tells us, "*He is to put on the sacred linen tunic, with linen undergarments next to his body .... These are sacred garments; so he must bathe himself with water before he puts them on.*"

**Although the act described in Leviticus was not specifically called baptism,** it highlights how important, holy and practical cleansing is to God. John's baptism of repentance follows this model of cleansing. John himself tells us the symbolic and practical washing done with water isn't the same thing as the great gift that Jesus gave us.

**John's baptism was an outward, external demonstration of the internal change happening within us.** Jesus' gift is focused on our inner being, on our spirit. Baptism is an outward sign of inner grace. It indicates a change in our soul. Our will, mind and body are all focused on connecting to God in a deep way. Our spirit connects to God's Spirit and we are remade. We're transformed, given a new life and a new direction in our life. We're God's beloved child. God's Spirit enters us.

**Baptism is one of God's greatest gifts for us.** Jesus was baptized to identify with us so we could be united with him in love. Best of all: we aren't alone. Reach out and touch and be reminded. Baptism is an act of grace and invitation. There's a call to extend that invitation, to pass the blessing of the Holy Spirit on. That's a movement, like the ripples on a pond after a stone falls into it. This moment started a movement.

**Who you identify with in your neighborhood or in our community?** Think about what you could do to demonstrate your care and unity in a meaningful way.

- Young adults, young parents, empty nesters, retirees
- Those looking for work, underemployed or unhappy with their job
- Those who are lonely, anxious, depressed or sad
- Those in the hospital, struggling with illness, disease or disability.

**What can you do to share God's grace with them?**

**A thought:** *When you think that being God's beloved is the core of who you are, it makes you feel...*

**Forgive others and forgive yourself.** Trust can be hard to give, but God is always ready and waiting, patient and not forceful, loving and running with open arms to welcome you home with love.

**I invite you share the joy of your baptism this week in two ways:**

- Each morning, say to yourself, "I am God's well-loved child!"
- Then tell your family and friends, "God loves you!"

**Isaiah 43:1-7 (CEB)**

But now, says the LORD - the one who created you, Jacob, the one who formed you, Israel: Don't fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name; you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; when through the rivers, they won't sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you won't be scorched and flame won't burn you. I am the LORD your God, the holy one of Israel, your savior. I have given Egypt as your ransom, Cush and Seba in your place. Because you are precious in my eyes, you are honored, and I love you. I give people in your place, and nations in exchange for your life. Don't fear, I am with you. From the east I'll bring your children; from the west I'll gather you. I'll say to the north, "Give them back!" and to the south, "Don't detain them." Bring my sons from far away, and my daughters from the end of the earth, everyone who is called by my name and whom I created for my glory, whom I have formed and made.

**Luke 3:15-17, 21-22 (CEB)**

The people were filled with expectation, and everyone wondered whether John might be the Christ. John replied to them all, "I baptize you with water, but the one who is more powerful than me is coming. I'm not worthy to loosen the strap of his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. The shovel he uses to sift the wheat from the husks is in his hands. He will clean out his threshing area and bring the wheat into his barn. But he will burn the husks with a fire that can't be put out."

When everyone was being baptized, Jesus also was baptized. While he was praying, heaven was opened and the Holy Spirit came down on him in bodily form like a dove. And there was a voice from heaven: "You are my Son, whom I dearly love; in you I find happiness."