



ST. ANDREW'S IN THE PINES EPISCOPAL CHURCH

Sermon by Pastor Jami Anderson, January 8, 2012

So, if you were at all paying attention, you've probably picked up that we have a theme going this morning about baptism. And if you are really quick-witted, you may have even noticed discussion about two types of baptism – the baptism of John the Baptist and the baptism of Jesus or the Holy Spirit. Then there is the third understanding of baptism as shown in this story about three little school boys who were being shunned out on the playground. They decided they were being picked on because they didn't go to church and they weren't baptized.

So one day after school the three of them walked into the church closest to their homes and asked the first person they saw if they could be baptized. The janitor said to them, "sure," and took them into the bathroom. He promptly dunked each of their little heads in the toilet bowl and said, "You are now baptized. Go out and play."

When they got outside one of them asked, "What religion do you think we are?" Another one said, "Well not Baptist, cause they throw your whole body in the water." And the other said, "Well, not Catholic, cause they just pour a little water on you." And then the first one said, "Did you smell that water?" And they all asked each other, Yeah, what do you think that means? "I think it means we are pisscopalians," said the first boy.

Now that sort of baptism is just plain wrong – none of us are baptized into a certain denomination! You aren't baptized Episcopalian or Baptist or Catholic – we are baptized into an identity as followers or disciples of Jesus Christ.

But that still leaves us with the question about the two different baptisms – the baptism of John for repentance and forgiveness and the baptism of Jesus – for the gift of the Holy Spirit. Which baptism is it that we do here in our church? Which baptism is Jesus baptized into and why?

I say why is Jesus baptized because he obviously participates in the baptism of John the Baptist and why would the sinless one need to be baptized for repentance and forgiveness? It makes sense for you and I to renounce our sins at the time of baptism and to promise a new way of life. But for Jesus – and for that matter – for little newborn infants? What sort of baptism was Jesus baptized into?

I believe, similar to the reason we continue to baptize infants, the baptism of Jesus by John the Baptist brought Jesus into a covenant relationship with God. He pledged himself as obedient to God and in full identity and solidarity with the rest of us humans. Jesus, like you and I was baptized into of life of God as our Lord and guide.

What then is the baptism of the Holy Spirit and have you and I received it? If you recall your own baptism of those of your children or friends, we all renounce Satan and evil and ask for forgiveness prior to the washing with the baptismal waters – so our service of baptism follows that of John the Baptist. Are we then like those disciples in Ephesus who don't know if we received the baptism of Jesus?

What we hear in the story of Jesus' baptism written in Mark is that the Holy Spirit descends like a dove on Jesus as he comes up out of the waters of John's baptism. In other words, the gift of the Holy Spirit settles on Jesus at the same time as his baptism of confession and forgiveness.

Likewise, there is that powerful and sacramental moment when I dip my finger into consecrated oil and I make a cross on the forehead of the newly baptized saying, "Lily, you are sealed by the Holy Spirit in Baptism and marked as Christ's own forever." Amen

So, our baptisms bring us fully into the baptism of the Holy Spirit and the baptism of obedience to God and identity as a member of the Body of Christ. And that brings us to the line in today's Collect: "Grant that all who are baptized into His Name may keep the covenant they have made."

Just like Jesus at his baptism, we make promises about the way we will live our lives. And then we pray that with God's help we will keep those promises and that is where the Holy Spirit makes a difference in our lives.

I credit my husband with the phrase "velvet sandpaper." I believe he one day commented that the Holy Spirit works in our lives like velvet sandpaper. I love that image – the soft, gentle, luxurious feel of velvet slowly rounding off our harsh places, creating us into kinder, softer human beings. It works for me because I have seen the beauty of rocks rolled around by water, or sculptures created by the wind. The same is happening to all of us.

We are sealed by the Holy Spirit in baptism and marked as Christ's own forever, and now we have a lifetime of turning and returning. Of being rolled and reformed, of turning and returning and becoming rounder, less judgmental, less concerned only about our own welfare, willing to share our lives in fellowship and worship with others. Holy Spirit, velvet sandpaper, creating in each of us beloved lives of great beauty.

Thanks be to God.