

THE CALLING OF OUR BAPTISM
Luke 3:21-22; Matthew 28:18-20

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Water—cool, clear, water. Seventy percent of the earth is covered with it. Two-thirds of the body is filled with it. In the beginning of time the Spirit of God hovered over the water and brought life out of chaos. What can be more refreshing on a hot summer day than a dip in the pool? What can be more comforting on a cold winter night than a long hot bath. My doctors have been encouraging me to drink 8 to 10 glasses of water a day. It's the fastest way to health they say.

The Church uses water. We use it in the sacrament of baptism. A sacrament takes something simple, like water, and lets it remind us of something spiritual, like grace. So by the waters of baptism we are reminded that by grace God claims us as his own, cleanses us from all unrighteousness, and calls us into service. Come let us remember our baptisms and be thankful.

BY THE WATERS OF BAPTISM WE ARE CLAIMED. We are claimed as children of God.

Identity is important these days. You can't get very far without it. A woman trying to make a purchase without proof of identity opened up her purse, pulled out a mirror, took a long look and said lovingly, "Yep, that's me all right." It didn't work.

A couple of years ago Sandy and I were flying to Cincinnati for my niece's wedding. It was a one day trip straight up and straight back so Sandy saw no reason to take a purse. We walked up to the ticket counter without proof of her identity. If you don't believe you can make a round trip from the airport to Brentwood and back to the airport in 30 minutes, I am here to tell you it can be done. I just don't recommend it.

At baptism we are claimed as children of God. Who is more loved than a baby surrounded by family and a community of faith being marked as a child of God? What is more meaningful than an adult who suddenly realizes that they belong to God and that they should come home to claim their true identity? The Church never gets better than at its baptismal moments because there we get our identity. We don't earn our identity, we don't work for our identity, we receive our identity by the very acts of baptism themselves.

One of my all time favorite movies is The Lion King. In the circle of life Simba, the lion cub, is destined to become the Lion King. The problem is that he doesn't believe that. Convinced by his Uncle Scar that he is responsible for his father's death, Simba wanders through the underworld with wart hog and the rascals.

Then one day Rafiki, the priestly monkey, hits Simba over the head with a coconut and says, "Who are you? I know who you are. You are Mufasa's boy." Down by the lakeside, peering into his own reflection in the water, Simba hears the voice of his father Mufasa saying, "Simba, remember who you are." Do you wonder where they got the idea for that particular movie?

The heavens opened at the baptism of Jesus and indeed a voice comes from heaven saying, "*This is my Son in whom I am well pleased and whom I love.*" Somebody needs to hear that today down in the depths of their hearts. Today by the waters of baptism, remember who you are. Hear once more the Holy Spirit say, "*You are my child, whom I love, with you I am well pleased.*" By the waters of baptism you and I are given an identity. By the waters of baptism we are given a name, we are called a name. We are given the name Christian.

Society says go out and make a name for yourself. Come back in 40 years and we will give you a gold watch, set you on the shelf, and let you draw social security. Out we go. We get our names on diplomas, awards, books and buildings. We come home and still wonder who we are.

When I earned my doctorate degree, my father who was a farmer said, "I always thought those little initials after people's names were kind of like a tail on a pig. They are kind of cute to look at but they don't necessarily make any more hog." So we look for an identity. We long for a name. By the waters of baptism we are given a name that is above every name. We are given the name Christian.

I don't know about you but that name is too much for me. It is too big. It is like Beth trying to become Elizabeth, Bobby reaching for Robert, Kitty trying to become Catherine, Jimmy longing to be James. The name Christian is more than I can bear. I didn't earn it, I didn't deserve it, I simply can receive it. It is God's gift to me and so I am named Christian. As Roberta Bondi says — Many of us who call ourselves Christian, long to be what we call ourselves.

By the waters of baptism I am claimed. We have an identity, we are given a name. By the waters of baptism we are claimed as children of God. Don't ever forget who you are.

BY THE WATERS OF BAPTISM WE ARE CALLED.

We are called to be disciples.

Jesus calls us o'er the tumult
Of our life's wild restless sea,
Day by day his sweet voice soundeth
Saying Christian, follow me.

Jesus calls us. By our baptism we are called to be disciples of Jesus Christ. It is a lifetime calling, it is bigger than we can accomplish but we lean into it by God's

grace. By faithfully following, we can be disciples of Jesus Christ. That is the calling on every person who is gathered here in this place today. It is God's calling upon our lives.

Jesus calls us to unceasing prayer. More things are accomplished by prayer than this world dreams of. I stand as a living witness to your unceasing prayer. When I have felt most alone in these last months, I wrapped the prayer shawl, given me by the Prayer Ministry of this church, around my shoulders and found comfort in the truth that I was being remembered. What you have done for your senior pastor cannot we do for others? Could not this become a place that is known for its prayer life? Could not this become a place where miracles happen? Could not this become a place where the moving of the Spirit was so powerful that when persons walked in the door they could feel the spirit of God among us. Let people's lives be transformed and touched and healed and saved in varieties of ways.

Jesus calls us to unconditional love. That is our business; that is our calling. Early Christians knew how to love one another. If we could create a community where it was outstanding because people truly loved one another it would make a mark on this world. Our calling and purpose as followers of Jesus Christ is to love God completely, to love self correctly, and to love others compassionately. That is our calling. We are called to be disciples of Jesus Christ through unceasing prayer, through unconditional love.

We are called by our baptism to unending service. I got a Christmas card from my 88-year-old aunt. She wrote it on Christmas day. She lives up in Covington, Kentucky. She used to run a little diner in Latonia. "I've been baking pies for Jesus," she said. "My church was feeding the homeless, so I baked 12 pies on Christmas Eve and took them up to the church." Discipleship has no retirement plan.

We are called to be in ministry and service to others. By the waters of baptism we are called to **BE** disciples, to live into our discipleship.

So let me ask you a question. If you were arrested for being Christian, would there be enough evidence to convict you? For whom are you living your life? Who is your audience? Whose approval means the most to you? We like approval and we need a fair amount of it to survive. Approval ratings change quicker than the weather. One day they wanted to crown Jesus king, the next day they crucified him as a criminal. One day we are complimented. The next day we are criticized. Whatever you do in this life will pass. But what you do for God will last.

WE ARE CALLED TO MAKE DISCIPLES.

Jesus said go and make disciples of all nations baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Our business is to make disciples.

That is why we are here. That is the business of the Church, to make Christian disciples.

I was flying to Kansas for a preaching mission when this guy, much bigger than I, asked in a burly voice, "And what do you do for a living?" I've never known how to respond to questions like that. I'm always tempted to play with people.

—I bury people.—I stand up and speak for 20 minutes and it takes eight people to carry all the money to me.—But this guy was big and I thought it best to be honest. So I said meekly, "I pastor a United Methodist Church." "You mean you are a preacher!" he exclaimed. After he stared at me for what seemed like an eternity, he said "I've never been inside a church except for weddings and funerals. If you don't mind my asking, what do preachers really do?"

If Jesus Christ had answered that question, he would have said "I am in the disciple making business." That is the business of the Church. We are in the disciple making business. That is why we are here, to make disciples of Jesus Christ.

Last year we baptized 146 persons in this congregation. One hundred and seventy-two joined this church by profession of faith. If the Bible is right, this church had all of heaven in an uproar 172 times last year for the Good Book says, "*There is more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over 99 righteous persons who need no repentance.*"

As baptized disciples of Christ can we keep heaven rejoicing more in 2004? Go and make disciples. Remember who you are. Remember why you are here. Remember your baptism and be thankful.

