

Sermon, The Baptism of Our Lord, 1/12/2020, Matthew 3:13-17 (*Elizabeth Felicetti*)

I haven't preached on a Sunday for three weeks, and now here we are, back to John the Baptist, the same guy who showed up in our readings three weeks ago, on the third Sunday of Advent. Welcome back, John! Today's reading takes place right after the part from the second Sunday of Advent. We'd heard about his locust-eating habit and how he called the Pharisees and Sadducees "a brood of vipers." He shouted at people to repent. John also told his followers that someone more powerful than he was coming.

And today, on the Feast of the Baptism of Our Lord, that even more powerful person is here: Jesus. Jesus showed up in the wilderness to be baptized by his cousin John. Now, we might have the same reaction that John the Baptist did: What are you *doing*, Jesus? You aren't a sinner. You don't need to repent. "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?" John asked Jesus, incredulous.

But Jesus said, "Let it be so now" and he waded into the river Jordan. Picture it. Picture all of those people John had baptized. They came for new life. They believed themselves cleansed. So, the river Jordan must have had some seriously sin-soaked waters; and Jesus waded right into them, and was submerged by John, and absorbed those sins. Our sins.

Jesus didn't need to be converted. Jesus did not need to repent. For Jesus, this baptism was a sign of his incarnation, of God becoming one of us. God came to earth as a human. Jesus was baptized, just like an ordinary human sinner. During this season of Epiphany, which will last until Ash Wednesday, we seek signs like this one.

We have a whopper of a sign here at St. David's today: the baptisms of two adults, Brittany and Andrew Thrift. Today is one of the four best days of the year for baptism, the Feast of the Baptism of Our Lord; and sometimes baptism is a little easier to understand with adults than babies. It's easier for us to accept the inherent sinfulness of humankind with adults than with innocent babies. Many Christian traditions don't baptize infants, instead wanting people to make an informed choice.

Adult baptisms are especially exciting to me, because I get to witness the candidate choosing Christ for him or herself: choosing to wade into the water, like Jesus. Although we don't really get a whole lot of wading with our little front here, but we'll make as much of a splash as we can.

In a few moments, we will get to hear Andrew and Brittany renounce Satan and the evil powers of this world and turn to Jesus and accept him as their savior. We will vow to do all in our power to support them in their new life in Christ.

Baptism is a beginning, not an end. Brittany and Andrew will agree to continue in teaching, fellowship, breaking of the bread, and prayers. To seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving their neighbors as themselves.

Some of us have been blessed to get to know Brittany and Andrew through our Inquirers' classes. These were designed for those seeking confirmation, as well as those who want a

refresher in the Episcopal church. When talking about the sacraments of Baptism and Eucharist in class, we came to realize that neither Brittany nor Andrew had been baptized. They decided to make that choice, together. What a blessing to be able to participate in that today.

I love preaching, but it's preaching: it's me standing up here talking to you, and sometimes some of you nod or laugh or glare at me or walk out; but for the most part, it doesn't feel like a conversation, which is why I usually sermon end with a question. Adults learn best through conversation, not lectures.

Inquirers' classes and Bible studies are conversations. People learn more from each other than they do from me. Both Brittany and Andrew offered wisdom in class and asked excellent questions.

Most of the people in this room today have been baptized, so I want to remind you that you are all also called to continue in the apostle's teaching and fellowship, which means continuing your Christian formation. We never graduate from Sunday School. Baptism was a beginning for us. We Christians continue to learn for our whole lives. I encourage you to attend the Inquirers' class the next time it's offered. Some people have taken it multiple times, because the characters change. The conversation changes. It's new every time. I learn something every time.

Jesus' baptism was the beginning for him. He had grown up. He was baptized, and then was tempted, and then began his public ministry. Jesus was perfect, but he was also formed by his baptism. It changed things for him, even though he did not need to be cleansed from sin. He identified fully with sinners like us, and then went willingly into the desert to be tempted by Satan, and then threw himself into leading and teaching and healing. Eventually, he was crucified, for us and for our sins.

How do you emulate Christ? Brittany and Andrew are taking the most important step today by becoming baptized. But what's next for them? And what's next for you?

Today, with these baptisms, we are being offered signs. Where will this sign lead you?