

Good Morning! Let us pray... Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful, and kindle within us the fire of your love. Send forth your Spirit and we shall be created And you shall renew the face of the earth. O God who by the light of the Holy Spirit did instruct the hearts of the faithful, grant that by the same Holy Spirit we may be truly wise and ever enjoy your consolations, through Christ our Lord. May the words of my mouth & the meditations of all our hearts be pleasing in your sight...rock, redeemer & renewer of us all. Amen.

Epiphany 1 —“Remember Your Baptism” Acts 19: 1-7; Mark 1: 4-11

Do you remember your Baptism? I've asked that question of many people during my time in ministry. It is always interesting to hear the response. The kids in the Confirmation class enjoyed having conversation with their parents about their baptism stories, too. That's what we do, as humans, tell our stories so we remember... our lives, our history, our lessons, our people.

Today we hear two baptism stories, one from Acts 19, a group of people learning about Jesus and the way of Jesus and the work of the Holy Spirit. The other story is from Mark's gospel sharing the Baptism of Jesus. It is important to note that each gospel Mark, Mathew, Luke & John has a story of Jesus' Baptism. That's a huge clue to the importance of this memory narrative.

One common fact across these stories is the role of John the Baptist.

JB is the archetypical prophet-preacher. Even his style of dress sets him apart for a special role. The prophet Isaiah provides the promise of one coming to prepare the way (Isaiah 40:3), and Mark's gospel starts out introducing us to this special messenger (v1-3). JB is calling people to change their hearts and lives... repent... or to turn to be right with God.

John makes it clear, there is One yet to come whose call to follow God's will & God's ways will be different, and will be with the Holy Spirit.

In every story of Jesus' baptism, there is JB saying he's not worthy to baptize Jesus, as Jesus comes out of water there is an opening in the heavens (light), a Spirit, descending like a dove on Jesus, and a voice from heaven claiming Jesus as beloved child of God.

In the Acts passage, Paul speaks with a group of disciples (believers) who have more to learn about the Way of Jesus... specifically the holy Spirit. Paul's teaching reveals something important, I think.

Paul explained, "John baptized with a baptism by which people showed they were changing their hearts and lives. It was a baptism that told people about the one who was coming after him. This is the one in whom they were to believe. This one is Jesus." And they were then baptized in the name of Jesus.

In essence, Paul offered Christ to these people, and, of course, throughout his ministry. Remember, Paul came to know Christ through an encounter while traveling and then through the action of Ananias... who was sent to Paul to unveil his eyes, to unbind his heart, and teach him about his encounter with Jesus.

Every time we sing the hymn Amazing Grace, we can remember how Paul was blind, but now sees... and we can recall how we, too have had our eyes opened to the work of God through Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit in our lives.

Friends, We, too, have been blind and bound by our limited understanding. Just as those disciples Paul met in Ephesus needed additional education and spiritual growth, we, too, need refreshing, updating, and continuous learning opportunities.

It is interesting to note a comment that "in the United States before 9/11, the number one resolution was 'to lose weight'. After 9/11 that #1 resolution changed to 'spend more time with my family'"¹. As have changed to a brand new calendar, we have, yet again, an opportunity to 'repent', to 'turn', and to change our hearts and lives as we remember our Baptismal vows and reaffirm our covenant with God, who claims us with an eternal covenant.

John Wesley wrote a Covenant Prayer that is found in our hymnals (607) and is provided in our January Seashell newsletter. It is a prayer I highly

¹ Bishop Coyner, A Year with John Wesley and our Methodist Values. Discipleship Resources, 2008. Page 13.

recommend to you for posting in a visible place so it remains fresh in mind and sight.

Here's the thing that has been on my heart these past few day... in this season of Epiphany... the Light which has come... the light which reveals God's love for us in the person of Jesus... the Light which lives and abides with us... the light which we are called to share... to let our light shine... in this season of Epiphany we cannot ignore what was revealed on January 6, 2021, the day of Epiphany.

What the nation and the world witnessed was not, in any way shape or form, in alignment with God's will or God's ways. What was witnessed is an incomplete understanding of humanity's purpose and complete misunderstanding of what humanity is called to do. These persons were misguided, misdirected, and without a doubt, missed the mark of Christian calling.

At the heart of Christianity is our sense that we are not our own, but because we are claimed by God through baptism in Christ, we are God's servants. Our Christian identity is rooted in love – for God and for our neighbors. Our identity as Christians transcends everything, including culture, country, gender, & status in society. In Christ, we are united in loving and serving, God and one another.

In just a moment, We will reaffirm our Baptismal Vows. This is the essence of who God is, renewing, affirming and forgiving in covenantal love... a promise given through Jeremiah (31:31) to write the covenant on our hearts.

As we reaffirm our covenant of belonging to God, hear the work we have to do in the days, weeks, months and year ahead... to renounce & reject and resist evil in all its forms.. to accept freedom and power given by God to resist oppression & injustice... to serve and welcome all people... and put God first. Let us remember our Baptism and be thankful! **BOW 111**

May the light of Christ shine upon us and shine forth from us that we may walk in the light of the Lord. AMEN.