

Defining Moments

week 2 – A Fresh Start

This is the second week of a five-part series we are calling **Defining Moments**. For most all of us, when we evaluate a single experience or even a season of our life, we don't judge the experience as a whole, but rather, we tend to judge and evaluate experiences based on specific *moments* that come to stand for the whole. This is why two people can attend the same event and walk out of it with completely different opinions about the experience. Their minds have fixated on different moments. Moments matter because they come to stand for how we view the world.

Moments matter because they form a kind of lens through which we understand ourselves, our world, our place in the world, our relationships, and God. Moments matter, and some moments matter *more*. Defining Moments are brief experiences, so brimming with meaning that they bring definition and clarity into our lives. And there are different kinds of defining moments.

Moments matter. They help us to define where we are and where we are going. When it comes to faith, they matter for *three reasons*: *First, God uses moments in your life to connect you to his purpose and plan for your life* and to encourage you to grow in trust in him. Everyone I know who is growing in trust can recall those moments. And those moments aren't just frozen experiences from the past, but they recall those moments to help them continue to grow in the future. Our role is to be on the lookout for those moments and pay attention to them. *Second, Moments are also key for understanding ourselves*. Some of your greatest fears or deepest hurts can be traced back to a few moments. You may be held back by a moment that happened a long time ago. If you recognize and understand those moments, God can help you break their power over you. *Third, we can leverage moments to love others*. As human beings we have a fundamental need to be understood. And so, understanding others and their perspective can be greatly improved by knowing their defining moment.

In addition, we can create and shape moments that express our love for people or help them to overcome their hurts and hang ups. You can use moments to recognize people in your life or to teach them valuable lessons.

Today we are looking at a Defining Moment in the life of Jesus. Before Jesus enters into his public ministry, his heavenly Father orchestrates a defining moment so that he will know the love and delight of his heavenly Father. The passage we are looking at today is the Baptism of the Lord from Mark's gospel:

On coming up out of the water he saw the heavens being torn open and the Spirit, like a dove, descending upon him. And a voice came from the heavens, "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased."

In this moment, we see the Father revealed in the voice, the Holy Spirit revealed in the dove and the Son revealed as the Son of God. The revelation of the Trinity. That was the defining moment that launched Jesus into his great and historic role and ministry. And why is he getting baptized? Baptism was a symbol of repentance. It was a sign that you were a sinner and needed to change. The word baptism means "to plunge." It was a baptism of full immersion. The idea was that you were being drowned because you needed to get rid of the old sinful self and have a rebirth. Jesus though, if he is the Son of God, did not need to do any of those things.

Jesus comes to get baptized because it is a way in which he identifies with us. At Christmas, we celebrate that God came as a little child. He is fully God and fully human. Then, throughout his life Jesus will show that he identifies completely with us. He identifies with us at his birth. He identifies with us on the cross. He identifies with us in every event of our lives. Here, he identifies with us by humbling himself to be baptized. He identifies with us so that God the Father will see Jesus in us. Because Jesus identifies with us, we have a relationship with God the Father and all that brings. It means that we root our identity in Christ.

In the passage we just read, the voice of God the Father speaks, and he says about Jesus, "You are my beloved Son, with you I am well pleased." The first truth of our identity in Christ is that we too are the beloved sons and daughters of God. We belong to him. Through baptism, we become joined to Christ and God sees us as his beloved son or daughter. Being the beloved constitutes the core truth of your being. More than being a lawyer, a doctor, an investor, an athlete, a student, a parent, a businessman, a grandparent, you are first and foremost a beloved son or daughter of your heavenly Father. You have a strong and powerful Father who takes delight in you. This is the deepest truth about your identity.

Moreover, through our Baptism, we too are launched out into the world with the power of the Holy Spirit to follow Jesus in his ministry. As adopted sons, adopted daughters of God we are called to a new life, a new way of being. Are you living the life that God has called you to? Now is a perfect time for a fresh start. What is the new thing in 2021 that you would like the Lord to do in your life?

It is ironic that church people so often get stuck in the past and hold on to outdated customs and broken systems way, way too long. because when Jesus came into this world, he ushered in fresh and new thinking. Jesus says of himself, *Behold, I make all things new.* Revelation 21.5 What is the *new thing* you want in your life?

If you truly believed that Jesus had the power and the authority *to give you a fresh start*, what would you like that to be? Maybe the fresh start you need is with your job. You are stuck in a company you don't like or work you hate. Maybe the fresh start you need is in school. It's time to apply yourself and get to work. Maybe you need to do something new in finances. You live paycheck to paycheck, and you are carrying a burden of debt that stresses you out. Maybe the fresh start is with your marriage. It needs renewed commitment and more joy. Maybe the fresh start is with your kids. You don't have the relationship you want with them. It always seems contentious- everything is always a fight. Maybe for you, it is friendship with God. You don't have a strong relationship with him. You don't know him intimately; you don't serve him passionately.

I don't know what you want God to make new for you in 2021, but I do know that God wants to do something new in your life. But for Jesus to do something new in your life, you have to take two steps. *The first step is simply to name it.* Jesus' power gets unleashed when people take time to be specific with what they want God to do. What is the new thing a loving, heavenly Father would want for you? Name it as clearly as you can and begin to pray for that specific intention. *Second step: You have to begin a new spiritual practice* One spiritual practice that you don't currently have Jesus will provide the power, but you have a part to play, you have to allow his power into your life.

We talk about the STEPS of discipleship often. Let's take a look at them now. The first of the STEPS is Serving in Ministry or Missions. Maybe your next step is to get up out of your chair and start serving in ministry or missions this year. Anytime is a

good time to start serving as a member-minister. Your sense of purpose could be transformed by taking this step.

The second of the STEPS is giving treasure. Your action step could be to start giving. It doesn't make sense on the surface but the way to invite God to do something new in your finances is to start giving. Give to the poor or someone in need or begin giving as an act of worship in your place of worship here at Holy Eucharist.

The third of our STEPS is Engaging in a Small Group. Now is a perfect opportunity to give small groups a try or join us for Lent. Small groups are the perfect place to grow in your faith and get accountable for other spiritual practices. Go to our website for more information on our small groups here at Holy Eucharist.

The fourth of the STEPS is Prayer and Sacraments. Your new step may be to commit to regular church attendance. You come every once in a while, but your new practice could be weekly attendance. Or maybe it's a commitment to a daily prayer time or strengthening that commitment with an additional commitment to some form of fasting each week. Fasting can bring your prayer to a whole new level. Your quiet time in prayer or celebration of the sacrament can bring fresh clarity to your relationships or the decisions you've got to make about your work or school.

Finally, the last and the easiest of the STEPS of all is the one so many of us are reluctant to take. It's simply sharing our faith. And this can be as easy as going online and emailing or texting one of our digital invitations from our invite page on our website. Even something as simple as that can positively impact your own commitment and someone else's life.

We are here to help you out with any of these steps you want to take. Email hec@holyeucharist.org or go to our website, and we can connect you to your next first step.

Allow God to do something new in your life this year. What is the new thing you need God's power to accomplish in 2021? Name it and take a spiritual action step this week. Don't wait. Through our baptism, we have the strength to make a new start. A simple, small decision today could change the arc of the whole year ahead. It could even be your defining moment. And that would be amazing.