

Most of us don't remember our baptism. It happened before we could choose it, before we could understand it, before we could decide what kind of faith we would embrace. And for many of us, baptism lived as a quiet note in the background of our lives, resurfacing only a few times a year when we stand together and say familiar words.

But I feel that something is shifting as we come to this place as adults on this day. Maybe you feel it too. What once felt rote or purely ceremonial is stirring something within us. The words we have repeated for years have started to sound less like something we perform and more like something that is asking something of us. Not only what we believe, but how we live. Not only what we say in this sanctuary, but how we live and move as we walk out these doors.

So, today, it is into our adult awareness that the Gospel speaks to us.

Jesus comes to the Jordan on that day, the same way everyone else does. He stands in line. He steps into the water with people carrying hope, and regret, and longing. There is no separation, no special treatment. Just a man entering the river with the rest of the crowd.

And there, in that ordinary and shared moment, something is revealed. The heavens open. The Holy Spirit descends. A voice speaks to name what is already true. *"You are my Son, the Beloved. With you I am well pleased."*

At this point in the story, we might say that nothing has been accomplished yet as Jesus enters the water, and in one sense that's true. His public ministry has not begun. No healings have taken place. No teachings have been offered. And yet something deeply real is already present. Jesus does not arrive at the river empty. He arrives formed by relationship, by community, by a life lived among others. He arrives trusting that God is already at work.

I don't believe this is so different from how many of us came to the waters of baptism. As children, we were carried there by others. Not because we had achieved faith, but because faith already surrounded us. Parents and grandparents, godparents and congregation trusted that Christ was present before we could name that presence for ourselves. Baptism was not a declaration of what we had done, but an act of trust in what God was already doing in us and around us.

So, baptism does not mark a beginning from nothing. It marks a recognition of grace that's already at work in human belonging. When the voice calls Jesus *"Beloved"*, it is revealing what has been true all along. Jesus is claimed before he begins his ministry, *just as we are claimed before we understand what that voice will ask of us.*

When we renew our baptismal vows, we aren't simply repeating words written for us on a page. We are returning to a promise that continues to unfold in us. Baptism is not something

that happened once and then stays put. It's dynamic, something that keeps working its way into our lives, shaping how we see ourselves and how we relate to one another.

In baptism, we are placed into a real and imperfect body that is part of something more. *The Body of Christ is not something we admire from a distance. It is something we inhabit. And that means what happens to one member of that body matters to all.*

This becomes especially clear in times like these, when many of us carry a sense of strain about the world around us. There is a dis-ease, a sense that community is fragile. To stay connected requires our intention. The choices we make as individuals ripple outward in ways we cannot always see.

Our baptismal covenant speaks directly to this reality. When we promise *to seek and serve Christ in all persons*, we are committing ourselves to a way of seeing each other. We are saying that Christ is present in real people, in real bodies, with real vulnerabilities. Seeking Christ in others means our lives are never only about ourselves. They are bound up with the well-being of the whole body.

We also promise *to strive for justice and peace and to respect the dignity of every human being*. These aren't abstract ideals. Justice and peace take shape in the real decisions we make about how we protect life, reduce harm, and care for those whose risk is greater than our own.

Our baptism also calls us to honesty, even when honesty carries risk. Striving for justice and peace does not mean avoiding hard truths for the sake of comfort. Sometimes faithfulness requires us to say, gently and clearly, that something is not as it should be. That kind of truth-telling can feel scary because it asks us to care more about the well-being of the whole body than about preserving our own comfort or avoiding tension. Jesus' baptism marks the beginning of a ministry that will consistently name what harms, while refusing to abandon relationship. Our baptism invites us into that same practice, trusting that truth spoken in love is not a threat to community, but one of the ways community is healed.

There is a parallel here that I think is worth naming, especially in a time when trust in shared knowledge has been disrupted. In our physical bodies, protection does not come from isolation, but from integration. Immunization, both passive and active, is one way the body is taught to recognize what threatens life and to respond in ways that protect not only the individual, but the whole.

It works within the body, strengthening it from the inside, so that the most vulnerable are not left to bear the greatest risk alone. This is incredibly important to protect those among us that for medical reasons are unable take advantage of this protection.

Baptism works in much the same way. It integrates us into the Body of Christ. It does not remove us from risk, but it forms us for shared life. Our baptismal vows are not held at a distance. They are integrated into us, shaping how we respond to harm, how we recognize vulnerability, and how we act for the sake of the whole. Baptism trains us, over time, to choose what strengthens the body rather than what fragments it.

In both cases, the goal is resilience...a protection that comes, not from isolation, but from connection. The science of immunization names a truth about our physical lives that baptism proclaims about our spiritual ones. We belong to one another, and our well-being is bound up together.

The gift of baptism is not that it removes complexity from our lives. It is what gives us a way to live faithfully within it. We are baptized into Christ and, through Him into one another. Into shared joy and shared risk. Into the work of protecting the vulnerable. Into the daily practice of choosing love in tangible ways.

So, today, as adults, we return to our baptism differently than we once did. What began before we had words of our own now asks something of us in a world that is complicated and fragile. The vows that once felt like something we just recited a few times a year, now informs how we live and how we remain in relationship.

We return to the water this day not because we have mastered these promises, but because we need them. We need them to remember who we are and whose we are. We need to hear again that before we get everything figured out, we are already named and claimed....**Beloved.**

So today, as we renew our baptismal vows, we are receiving again the gift that continues to shape our lives. Today, as we say, "*We will, with God's help.*"

Amen.