

Pastor T.C. Arnold
Baptism of our Lord
January 12th, 2014
1 Corinthians 1:26-31

Put in perspective, we really are “insignificant” in terms of the world. If something happened to you, if you got sick or went missing (the good Lord forbid it) would it put the world on hold? Would the country shut down or the state pause to mourn or show great concern? Would the city government hold a vigil for you? Yes, your family, your parish-family, your work family, your friends would all be affected. However, these important folks to us cannot be compared to a global population of people who might not get so concerned if something happened to you. Even the most significant in the world have a small percentage of the population stop with mourning or reflection if something happens.

Paul tells us that it doesn't matter. It doesn't matter how “significant” you are as compared to others. In terms of insignificance... with the “insignificant” in particular, our Lord operates. Yes, He operates for the insignificant, but He also operates with the insignificant. For this reason He shares with the Church in Corinth, who believed that the most significant, the most upright, the most wealthy and notable among them were better than others, that the Lord uses what is considered unimportant or inconsequential to make those of similar status great.

So Paul puts them in their place right away and says, “*Consider your calling: not many of you were wise according to world standards, not many were powerful: not many were of noble birth...*” But that's okay, says Paul. Because, “*God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, even the things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are...*”

Take a look at what God chose. We just got done celebrating it. God chose the flesh of a child and a manger for a crib. How much more lowly can you get than that? God chose the life of a carpenter's son. How much more lowly can you get than that? God chose twelve insignificant men as disciples – and the women that He spoke to and that followed? – they were sinners with diminished reputations. Of course, God chose two other lowly and insignificant things that we focus on today – for the sake of all of us. Those two insignificant items are what we talk about so much here at Christ Lutheran and they, even as petty as they seem – are so substantial for you today. Those two things are what we focus on today: The water and the cross.

This first Sunday after Epiphany is often times celebrated as the Baptism of our Lord. It's fitting because as we start Epiphany we begin at the beginning of Jesus' ministry. And what better place to start the ministry of Jesus than at the waters of Baptism. That's where He began and that is where He begins us. It's not fancy. It's not all that grandiose – especially for Jesus. He's standing in the middle of a shallow river ready to get baptized by a strange relative of His (a cousin) who doesn't even want to do it. John cries out – “you baptize me!” Jesus wouldn't have it. He begins His public ministry on a rather ordinary, dare we say, odd, stage.

How odd this seems to us – how much more odd does baptism appear to those who know nothing about the Christian faith? We bring our little babies up to that font. What in the world is a font? It has a little water and the pastor says a few prescribed words and *Bing-Bang-Boom* – it's done. That's it. How odd.

So what do we do for those who don't understand? We, as frequent attenders to this church, know how things work around here. We know what to expect. We have seen it many times. We have

become accustomed to seeing it, hearing it, singing it, etc. These seemingly insignificant things like water on a baby's head or taking a little bread and wine at the altar while all of us are kneeling – not a posture many of us are in any other time of the week – mean a lot to us but are strange to our friends and neighbors who don't understand. What do we do?

Well, as it was for the Baptism of our Savior in the Jordan, we have to begin somewhere. Start by bringing someone you know who has no church home to this place. God, through the work of the Holy Spirit will grow a faith of significance through His Word. These things that seem strange at first will not stay strange for long. Do this for the sake of your neighbor – and for the sake of yourself.

Why do I say, "For yourself?" Because it's easy for us to remove ourselves from these simple things that God uses to show us great things. They are so simple and we know about the already, we tend to think we can do without them for another week, a month, most of the year. It is our own pride that stands in front of things like that font over there – that stands before Jesus our Savior standing in the midst of the Jordan, and says, "I'm too busy for God, I'm too tired for the Lord this day. Someone else can be responsible for inviting my neighbor, my friend or my relative who hasn't a clue what faith in a Savior who comes to us in such humble means really is. Beloved, we can't have this attitude about those who are around us. We can't have this approach regarding our own lives. You, who may be insignificant to the world, are not insignificant to your Lord. His desire is to feed you, strengthen you, with what gives you a life eternal.

And then there is that second thing – it goes along with the water. It's the cross. We sang about it this morning. We will sing about the blessed cross of our Jesus again. Yet another object that seems strange, odd or even insignificant. Perhaps for some it's just a piece of jewelry or a symbol of peace. It's so much more.

Lift high the cross – because in the cross water in baptism has its power. Lift high the cross – because on that cross was done for you what makes the Word of God you hear in this place extremely significant. If you want to talk about foolish or weak or low like Paul does in 1 Corinthians chapter one, then take a look at the cross. It was designed to lay those who are placed on it into the lowest of estate. A tool of torture, disgrace and humiliation – a strange and odd choice of death for our Lord – was made by God to be the means by which you have every bit of great significance to the one that matters the most – Jesus.

After Kansas City weatherman Don Harman's untimely death back in 2011 the Fox 4 news team began a "you matter" campaign. Depression and despair are epidemics in the world we live in today. Some feel such an insignificance that they believe death is the only way out. All of us have been affected by such feelings and tragedies in our life. Words like "you matter" are important for us to hear from the ones we love – especially from the one who loved us first. You matter so much – that God would die for you – and use the simplest of means to give you life. These things are abundant – water, His Word, His cross – so to show you that His love and forgiveness are abundant.

Never forget, God chose what is foolish, weak and low. God chose water and a cross to bring down those who believe they are high and mighty, and bring us up who are stricken and lowly. It matters not what significance you are to the world. It matters who are to your Lord. And this is who you are to your Lord – a son, a daughter – a soul so loved that you are saved. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.