



Call Me Naive

Isaiah 43:1-7; Luke 3:15-17, 21-22

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The gospels tell us that Jesus begins his ministry shortly after his baptism by John in the river Jordan. It is evident that the event of his baptism is an important turning point in Jesus' life. Both Matthew and Luke tell us something about his infancy and what they tell us gives us a hint of the life choices that Jesus will be making. But whatever they were able to learn about Jesus' private life did not fully prepare them for the way Jesus chose to make his entrance of the world scene.

His choice to associate with the least of society was evident from day one. Jesus was born in a poor family, worshipped by shepherds, honored by foreigners, hunted by rulers, and a refugee with his parents in a distant land at a young age. As a teen, he demonstrated deep knowledge and wisdom to the priests in the Temple and declared to be about his Father's business, namely restoring God's reign on earth.

The gospel of Mark, the first gospel story to be written, gives us a straight and short description of what happened at Jesus' baptism. As time lapses, the issue of Jesus' baptism along sinners, tax collectors, and soldiers becomes more sensitive. To the gospel of Matthew, Jesus' stubborn determination on being baptized by John is pretty much in line with his inferior status of disciple and his insistence of being treated as a sinner among sinners. Luke also tells us that John was the main character of the story: people were betting that he (and not Jesus at that early stage) was the Christ.

In both Mark and Matthew, at the time of baptism the Spirit descends on Jesus and the heavenly voice speaks of him as God's beloved Son as he emerges from the waters. In Luke, the Spirit in the bodily form of a dove descends on Jesus *after* the baptism and as he was at prayer. That is also when he is declared God's Son. The baptism and the descent of the Spirit along with the heavenly voice are separated from the baptism which we know is by John, but John's name is not mentioned (another way for Luke to disassociate Jesus from John). In the gospel of John, Jesus' baptism is a past event and John the Baptizer gives his testimonial about "the Lamb of God." The affirming heavenly voice and the descent of the Spirit are only mentioned indirectly.

John's baptismal rite, unlike people's ordinary ritual washings, had to be received: it was a passive action, people did not do it for themselves but acknowledged that one greater than them would be necessary to immerse them into the waters. This established a unique relationship between John and the baptized, symbolizing their acceptance of his call to radical conversion.

Baptism was a public proclamation of commitment; it signaled a life-changing decision. Jesus was in the crowd listening to John's message of repentance. He joined tax collectors, soldiers and throngs of ordinary folk going to be baptized. He identified himself with their hopes and needs rather than with the righteous who felt no need for major changes. This, Jesus' first public

act, declared his loyalty: He would stand with the people who desired a radical return to God for themselves and their world.

And yet, John was clear and announced that the people will see one greater than him who would baptize in fire and the Spirit. John's baptism was one of repentance and offered to prepare people for the coming of the Messiah. The sinner would approach God and God would cleanse the sinner of sins for a renewed life in God. The new baptism by fire and the Spirit would acknowledge and affirm the newly baptized as a new creation in the Spirit and a child of God.¹

Often, our baptismal covenant becomes an accomplishment—an ending point. Luke reminds us that when Jesus was claimed by the Holy Spirit as the beloved son, it was the beginning of Jesus' path toward the cross. Therefore, our baptism in Christ is also just the beginning, our joining of God's plan for all humanity to experience total liberation.

We know whom we trust. We might be returning to worship after a long lapse due to covid or for past hurts experienced in the Church or for other personal issues. But something nudges us to get closer to the Lord again. Are we going to be disappointed? Are we going to be hurt again? How will we know if this isn't a waste of time?

Call me naïve, but if God's voice affirms Jesus as the one in whom God is pleased, I will trust God and follow in Jesus' footsteps. I will trust the Spirit of God to give me strength when I hurt, perseverance and courage when I am under pressure.

Today is a good day to renew our baptism and the commitments that have flowed from it. It is always risky to make commitments about an unknown future, but like our Lord, we can trust that the Spirit will lead us to where God will say, "You are my beloved in whom I am well pleased."

Do I believe that? How would my day unfold if I stepped into that truth and lived it out? How different would my trust in God be if I kept that truth ever present on my mind? It's when we lose track of that truth that fear attacks us. By the grace of God, we are not overcome. Truth be told, I feel like a fool when I don't hold on to God's promise and affirm my identity as a child beloved of God.

Let a life of prayer, Scripture reading, sacramental worship, generous service, and community living support us in growing in our love for the Lord and our commitment to a growing consciousness of the presence of God in our life. Amen.

¹ The significance of baptism as a New Testament ceremony is that, as believers in Jesus Christ, we are baptized into His death ([Romans 6:3](#)) and raised to walk in newness of life ([Romans 6:4 KJV](#)).