

One of my favorite songs about baptism is not a hymn, but a folk song featured in the movie *O Brother, Where Art Thou*. Song writer Alison Krauss captures the compelling nature of baptism as she sings, “O sinner, let’s go down. Let’s go down, come on down. O sinner, let’s go down, down to the river to pray.” There is something about the nature and grace of God that compels us to be washed anew in life giving waters. Something that leads us to make a covenant with Christian community to support each other in our baptismal vows.

But often this sacrament of the Church can become confusing when we celebrate the Baptism of the Lord Sunday. Why exactly did Jesus need to be baptized if he was sinless? Is the Lord’s baptism the same as our baptism? And why was Jesus baptized by John, who proclaims that he was not worthy to untie the throng of Christ’s sandals?

Each of the Gospels has a slightly different account of Jesus’ baptism, a different reason for its necessity. Luke tells us in today’s scripture passage that *when all the people were being baptized, Jesus was baptized too*. How often we overlook the statement that Jesus was baptized with other people. Here Jesus acted in solidarity with those who struggled daily with sin. Can you envision it? Christ standing in line with the broken people of the world waiting for his turn to be lead under the waters of repentance and brought back up into the world of new life. How uncomfortable does it make you to think about Christ amongst these people? But that is exactly where Christ was and where he can still be found today. Amongst the broken people in the world. Waiting to bring them new hope, salvation, new beginnings.

Brothers and sisters, are we too standing in solidarity with the broken, sin-torn people of this world? There is a common saying that the Church is not a museum of saints but a hospital for sinners. Do we live like that? Solidarity does not mean that we go back to our life of sin, rather it means that we understand the turmoil of that life and want to stand in line with those who are seeking to start anew. Seeking Christ’s forgiveness. We understand. We’ve been there. We still go there, when we fall short of God’s glory and call on our lives. Do we stand with those who are seeking to transform their lives in the waters of baptism, or are we off to the side, judging them. Not welcoming them into the fold? Time and time again as a pastor I have people tell me that they aren’t good enough to come to church. Brothers and sisters if we are truly a hospital for sinners then we need to live like it. We need to confess our sins, instead of pretending that we are perfect and don’t have any. Because somewhere along the line people have started to associate the Church with the museum of saints. We’ve stopped standing in line with those seeking to be transformed, encouraging them to come into the waters. We’ve stopped remembering that we too are in need of Jesus’ grace.

Luke’s account of Jesus’ baptism also reminds us that baptism is coupled with prayer. When we baptize someone we covenant to uphold them in prayer and walk with them along their faith journey. Luke tells us that Jesus was praying after he had been baptized. Jesus was not only with those in need of God’s healing grace and love, standing with them, but then praying for us. Praying for his ministry. Praying to God. Christ reminds us that prayer is vital for our life as Christians. So vital that he would not face the next act of his public ministry, the temptations, without it. He was not choosing this baptism or ministry by his own authority, but by the leading and strength of God. And as he prayed the heavens were open and the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove descended upon him. We too must pray for the leading and strength of the Holy Spirit in our lives. We too must pray as we enter into whatever aspect of ministry God is calling us to. For with each of our baptisms comes a call on our lives to go into the world and make disciples of all

the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Triune God. Brothers and sisters are we coming daily to God in prayer asking for strength to live out our baptismal vows and whatever God has called us to? Are we praying for each other? Are we confessing our sins before God and praying for forgiveness? Are we knee-bent before the throne of grace?

As Jesus was praying and the Spirit descended, a voice came from heaven proclaiming, "*You are my Son; the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.*" With this voice came the confirmation of Jesus' ordination as the Messiah. This call will sustain Jesus through the rest of his ministry and will be his public identity even to his death.

In my call paper that I wrote a few years ago, I stated that my call to ministry is clearly linked to my baptism. In fact, we are all, lay and clergy alike, have a call that comes at our baptism. A vocation to live a life for Christ wherever we may find ourselves. A call that we cannot fully live into apart from the body of Christ. For our call is clearly linked with our identity given at our baptism. Our identity as the Beloved of God. When we baptize people into the body of Christ, we do not use their family name. Instead we only use their first and middle names, signifying that their last name, their sir name, is that of the family of Christ. That of being the beloved. Yet, far too many people who come out of the waters of repentance do not act as if they are the beloved. Do not act as if they are claimed by the love of Christ into the family of God. Brothers and sisters, do you know in your heart that you are claimed as the Beloved of God and do you live into this claim daily?

Jesus does not utter a word in Luke's account of his baptism, yet the story has powerful implications for the Church today. Jesus stood in solidarity with those who are seeking the Messiah. Those who didn't realize that he had already come. Those who didn't understand who the Messiah would be or what type of salvation he would bring. Are we standing with those who need to know the love of Christ in our world today? Are we standing with those who don't realize that Jesus has come or the powerful message of repentance he wants to bring into their lives? Do we pray for the people we are surrounded by? Pray that they will be lead to the life giving waters? Praying that once lead there they will fully live into their baptismal vows, calling, and identity as the beloved of God? Do we live lives that proclaim our own vows, calling, and belovedness? Do we live as if our baptisms truly were a new beginning or have we forgotten what this sacrament truly means?

Kruass understands this need for solidarity in baptism, this claim of belovedness, this change of life. With each verse she pleads and prays for another group of people to join her in going down to the waters of baptism. Brothers, sisters, fathers, mothers. All sinners. All in need of the new and renewed community that Christ is offering.

This morning we too have an opportunity to renew our covenant with Christ and reclaim our identity as the Beloved. Today let us renew ourselves as we remember our baptism in prayer and thanksgiving. Amen.