

Sermon: It's Amazing what a little water can do
Text: Mark 1:4 – 11
Date: January 11, 2009 AM
Place: Jesup First UMC

It's just a little bit of water, but it's amazing what a little water can do! A little water can quench a raging thirst. A little water mixed with meal or rice can feed the hungry. A little water and a bar of soap can clean a dirty face. A little water flowing consistently in the same spot can form a deep canyon. And a little water, if it falls at the right time, can cause God's people to go back to bed instead of coming to church. It's amazing what a little bit of water can do!

Today is the date on the church calendar called The Baptism of our Lord. The early church set aside special Sundays to celebrate the great events in Jesus' life: His birth, His baptism, His triumphal entry, His crucifixion, and His resurrection. And so, we call this Sunday, the Baptism of our Lord.

Now the Methodist Church, like most Protestant churches only celebrates two sacraments: Baptism and Holy Communion. And though we disagree sometimes about how we should baptize – some baptize by emersion, some sprinkling, and some by pouring – we all agree that baptism is a significant moment in the life of every believer.

You may have heard about the little Methodist girl that went down to the Baptist church to see her cousin being baptized. Oh she was amazed; she had never seen anything like that. Well, a few days later, her mama went looking for her and found her in the bathroom with all her dolls lined up against the wall. And she preached to them and shook her finger a

time or two and then, she grabbed them by the arms, pushed them down in the water and said: *“I baptize you in the name of the Father and of the Son and ... in the hole you go.”*

Well, maybe Little Susie didn't get it quite right, but somehow she came to understand that baptism is a significant event. And that's what Jesus teaches us. In our text this morning, John the Baptizer was preaching and baptizing in the River Jordan and Jesus of Nazareth came down into the water. Now, one of the gospels tells us that John didn't want to baptize Jesus; He didn't feel worthy of the task, but Jesus insisted. And so, John complied and as Jesus was coming up out of the water, the sky split open, the Holy Spirit descended upon Him like a dove, and a voice came from heaven that said: *“You are my beloved Son, and I am very pleased with you.”*

Now, sometimes you and I are a little like John; we're not quite sure why Jesus was baptized. I mean, after all, Jesus was perfect; He didn't need to be baptized because He was a sinner in need of forgiveness. And yet, He chose to be baptized anyway. Why? What was Jesus' baptism about? You see, I think if you and I could come to understand what happened to Jesus at His baptism, then maybe we could have a better appreciation for what God did for us in our baptism too.

1. IN BAPTISM, JESUS WAS CLAIMED!

Verse 10 says: *“He saw the heavens split open and the Holy Spirit descending like a dove on Him. And He*

heard a voice from heaven saying, ‘You are my beloved Son, and I am very pleased with you.’”

I remember the day I drove up to daddy’s shop and there was a group of men standing around outside with daddy. And when I got out of my car and walked up, daddy put his arm around me and said: “*Hey, I want y’all to meet my son, Tucker. He’s a Methodist preacher.*” I had my chest stuck out so far that the buttons on my shirt were straining. Why? Because daddy claimed me! I am Tucker Lewis, son of Nelson Lewis; I have been claimed.

But I was claimed one other time in my life too ... at my baptism! At my baptism, God put His arm around me and said: “*This is my boy.*” Paul said it like this: *“For His Spirit speaks to us deep in our hearts and tells us that we are God’s children. And since we are His children, we will share His treasures – for everything God gives to His Son is ours too.”*

In our baptism, God claims us! We are His children, adopted into His family, and grafted into Him, the True Vine. We are claimed!

2. IN BAPTISM, JESUS WAS NAMED!

When Jesus came up out of the water, God said: *“You are my beloved Son.”* I don’t know about you, but I love my name. When I was in elementary school, I was Tuck ... Tuck Lewis. Mama and daddy called me Tuck; my grandparent’s called me Tuck; and my teachers and friends called me Tuck. But you know, with a name like Tuck, it’s not always easy. I’ve been called a lot of things in my life. But in the 8th grade,

my school got a new computer and overnight, I became Tucker ... Tucker Anderson Lewis. Now, that sounds really important, doesn't it? Tucker Anderson Lewis.

But when I was baptized, I was given a new name ... son of God. I John 3:1 says: "See how very much our heavenly Father loves us, for He allows us to be called His children, and we really are." He calls me son. He calls me friend; John 15:15 says: "I no longer call you servants ... now you are my friends." He calls me friend. I have a new name. And the best part of all is that my name is written in the Lamb's Book of Life.

In our baptism, God names us! We are His beloved children. We are named!

3. IN BAPTISM, JESUS WAS AIMED.

Immediately after His baptism, Jesus was driven into the wilderness by the Holy Spirit and from there, He started His public ministry. Baptism became His anointing for ministry; it is *the* event, *the* moment that drove Him into public ministry.

An interesting thing happens in the family of God; we who once were alienated from God have been reconciled to Him and given a new ministry, the ministry of reconciliation. We are a "Kingdom of Priests," "a Royal Priesthood." Paul calls us "Ambassadors for Christ." And our anointing for ministry, *the* event, *the* moment that drives us into ministry is our baptism.

In the Columbus District, the pastors took turns sharing their testimonies at our monthly pastor's

meetings. And I remember one pastor who was telling about his baptism and he said: *“I’ve always known that I was a minister. The first time I realized it I was kneeling at the altar at my baptism and I sensed God’s presence and it was almost like I could hear Him say, ‘Go’!”*

Friends, in reality, that happened to each of us, for in our baptism we were aimed ... aimed in service ... aimed in mission and ministry. We were aimed!

These are the things that happened to Jesus at His baptism. He was claimed, named, and aimed. And indeed, this is what our baptism is about. But there’s something else ... something else that happens to us in our baptism, something that couldn’t happen to Jesus ...

4. IN BAPTISM, WE HAVE BEEN CHANGED.

II Corinthians 5:17 says: *“What this means is that those who become Christians become new persons. They are not the same anymore, for the old life is gone. A new life has begun.”* You see, that was John’s message all along. Mark tells us: *“John the Baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.”*

This change begins with **CONFESSION**. Verse 5 says: *“People from Jerusalem and from all over Judea traveled out into the wilderness to see and hear John. And when they confessed their sins, he baptized them.”* Confession simply means that you and I plead guilty before God. You see, God already knows everything you’ve ever done – good and bad. When you

confess, you're not telling Him anything new; you're simply pleading guilty, acknowledging your sins in the presence of God. Confession!

This change involves a **CLEARING**. Verse 4 says: John "*was preaching that people should be baptized to show that they had turned from their sins and turned to God to be forgiven.*" In baptism, our sins are forgiven, the slate is wiped clear. Cleared!

This change involves a **CLEANSING**. Your sins aren't just forgiven they are removed from us as far as the east is from the west. In baptism, we are justified. God makes us so clean that it's just like we never sinned in the first place. And we're also regenerated; we're made new. Cleansing!

Confession! Clearing! Cleansing! A change has taken place. We're not the same anymore.

Bishop Willimon summed up perfectly what baptism means. He wrote: "*In baptism, we are initiated, crowned, chosen, embraced, washed, adopted, gifted, reborn, and thereby sent forth and redeemed. We are identified as one of God's own; then, we are assigned our place and our job within the Kingdom of God.*" All that from a little bit of water! Now, isn't it amazing what just a little water can do?