

Hopkins South Monterey

United Methodist Church

Affecting Lives Through Jesus Christ

Scripture & Sermon Script

Jan 10, 2021

Pastor Kelsey

Introduction

Before I break into the scripture and sermon for today I want to take a moment to address current events and recognize that those events definitely have an effect on the way that Baptism is remembered this week.

On Wednesday we all watched the news and saw a mob of people attack our capitol building with the claimed intent of halting the democratic process and bringing harm to those trying to carry it out. In that attack, we saw many people carrying with them the symbols of their beliefs. Confederate flags, nazi symbolism, shirts saying “6 million wasn’t enough” and other pro-holocaust messages, and a lot of hateful speech toward People of Color. In hindsight, we look at all that happened and by whom and can recognize the ways that this majority white mob was treated so differently both in preparation and in action than previous protesting groups this year, in particular those that were majority black people protesting police brutality and racism. And alongside all of that hate, racism, violence, and calls for oppression, were Christian flags and Jesus 2020 signs flown with pride. No matter your stance on all that went down on Wednesday, no matter your stance on Trump or Biden or any of the congresspeople, by those flags and signs of our faith being flown at that riot alongside all of those symbols and messages of hate and violence and oppression, those rioters are making claims that God is for that hate, violence and oppression. These actions and stances shown on Wednesday are but a symptom of the greater movements and systems of violence and oppression that are at work in our country.

As Christians we cannot not keep ignoring these messages of violence and hate made in the name of Jesus. Not because it just makes us look bad, but because speaking out against and working to rectify injustice, evil, and oppression is crucially a part of what it means to be a part of the Christian family as we promise in our Baptismal vows. Our Gospel is a message of Good News for all people, a message of God’s Kingdom being brought about on earth. God’s Kingdom is not brought about by turning a blind eye to evil, injustice, and oppression, God’s Kingdom is brought about when there is a turning from sinful ways and implementing of ways that are more inline with how God desires our world to be.

I will leave this here, as I don't want to just start preaching and skip over the scripture and the unique sermon time I have for you today.

Lastly though, I just want to recognize that I just said a lot of bold and maybe challenging things. Please do reach out to me if you find yourself confused or troubled or even angry by anything I have said or anything brought up in the sermon. I would love to hear what you are feeling and talk through things on a deeper or more conversational level. This really applies to every week, but feels like a particularly important invitation during a week like this one.

Scripture: Mark 1:4-11

4 John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. 5 And people from the whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem were going out to him, and were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. 6 Now John was clothed with camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. 7 He proclaimed, "The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the thong of his sandals. 8 I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."

9 In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. 10 And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. 11 And a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased."

Sermon

This week, Pastor Kelsey participated in a collaborative sermon with a collection of other UM Clergy. We all reflected on this week's text, our own baptisms, and/or how they affect what we think of the events at the capitol on Wednesday. The following is Kelsey's contribution to the video. Watch this week's youtube video of the service to see the rest of the reflections.

Jesus's Baptism as we read about in Mark, marks the beginning of his public ministry. The beginning through this baptism moment is so momentous because it is not just a casual "ready, set, go" start but, instead, as sinless Jesus was baptized, it was a moment in which God changed the narrative of baptism from a practice to wipe away a

person's sins, to a sacrament that recognizes Jesus's belovedness by God, and subsequently our belovedness by God, and shows us our place in God's family. As God announces for all to hear, "You are my Son, the beloved; with you I am well pleased," God is saying, "This is my Son, he is beloved and this changes everything."

When we continue the practice of Baptism now, 2000 years later, we continue this new idea of Baptism, a Baptism that is God working through the one who baptizes to officially promise them of their belovedness in God's eyes. In that same moment the presider and the congregation are also promising to remember that person's belovedness, remind them of God's love when they need it, and help them grow in their relationship with God throughout their life. It is celebrating their place in the church family, in God's family.

Recognizing God's love is not all that Baptism is about. Like all big promises that God makes throughout God's story as we hear about through the Old and New Testaments, when God makes us a promise, it usually comes with expectations of what our response should be. These kinds of big, two-way promises are usually called Covenants, you know like the covenants with Abraham and Noah.

Yes, God's love for us is bigger than if we are behaving well or not, because God has such great grace for all of us, but ultimately, if we respond to that love, and say, "Yes, thank you God for that love, I want to be in relationship with you!" then there are some expectations for our side of the relationship. So, Baptism, as we think about it today, is less a one-and-done practice, but the start of a covenant with God. As I was thinking about the covenant as expectations for how we are to live, I realized they are kind of like family values. I think of all the times I have heard in tv shows or movies when the teenager gets caught doing something bad and the parents say something like, "In this house, we do not go sneaking around and lying about where we are going! We are honest with each other!" When someone is baptized, there is a series of vows agreed to by the person getting baptized or their guardians and the congregation as a promise to God to hold up our side of the covenant, to hold up our family values. It is like saying, "In this house, of God, we do/act/ believe/ treat people [this way.]" And for those that are baptized when they are a baby or too young to fully understand what is going on, that is partly what we recommit to with Confirmation and really, every time we remember our baptism or are part of the congregation when we baptize someone new. Each of those moments are to remind us of our church family values and a chance to recommit to living them out in our own lives.

The baptismal covenant in our hymnal describes the vows, our family values, this way: "Since the earliest times, the vows of Christian baptism have consisted first of the renunciation of all that is evil and then the profession of faith and loyalty to Christ."

These promises are a true commitment to living our lives differently, how God would want us to, instead of how the world teaches us. These promises are really quite significant commitments to living out our belovedness by God and recognizing the belovedness in all peoples, which means not just saying people are beloved, but working toward bringing about a world and communities that treat all as equally beloved by God, and with that, recognizing the ways that current systems and actions do not measure up.

It is because of these family values that talking about Baptism is particularly poignant this week. This week brought to the forefront the need for many of us to remember our baptismal vows and recognize the consequences of not holding ourselves and others accountable to them. Let us recognize the horrific day for the true horror it was, and also look for the ways that God can and is using that moment to tear open our world from the heavens and descend as the Spirit, as God did at Jesus's baptism, to revitalize the ways we live out our faith and relationship with God so that more of our communities and world can look like God's Kingdom instead of our own.