

*Call to Worship*

We were made and named by God. It is God to whom we belong and in God whom we find our true identity.

**Let us worship this One, our Creator, offering the praise of our lips, the love of our hearts, and the devotion of our lives.**

*Prayer of Invocation*

**Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, in whose name we pray, and bless, and baptize. Come into our presence, into our lives with your heavenly power. We long to see you touching us as your Spirit touched Jesus. We want to hear you calling us your daughters and sons, your beloved children, as Jesus heard your voice. We are too often reserved, and seldom do we acknowledge those moments that are uniquely from heaven. Immerse us in Jesus' baptismal story today. Amen.**

*The Word*

Acts 10:34-39

Common English Bible

Peter said, "I really am learning that God doesn't show partiality to one group of people over another.

**Rather, in every nation, whoever worships him and does what is right is acceptable to him. This is the message of peace he sent to the Israelites by proclaiming the good news through Jesus Christ: He is Lord of all!**

You know what happened throughout Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism John preached. You know about Jesus of Nazareth, whom God anointed with the Holy Spirit and endowed with power.

**Jesus traveled around doing good and healing everyone oppressed by the devil because God was with him. We are witnesses of everything he did, both in Judea and in Jerusalem.**

*Living the Word*

In 2005, I had 2 credits left to finish my seminary work at Duke Divinity School. They allowed me to earn them with an independent study trip to England touring John Wesley's homes and outdoor preaching locations, after which I wrote a paper of my insights. While on the trip my friend and I, side tripped to see if we could find my ancestor's farm in Braunton, Devon. We went directly to the local Historical Society Museum, upon entering the city. My heart pounding with excitement, I asked them about my ancestors, which I had traced there as far back as the 1400s.

The two women just giggled and one of them said, "You silly Americans, always looking for where you came from." I asked, "Don't you want to know where you are from?" and the reply came "We don't have to, we came from here." Moving right along...we were able to visit the actual farm, Luscott Barton, where my family resided.

We followed that with a visit to the local Church, now Church of England, but once Roman Catholic. I was enthralled. After a while my friend left me there to go and find us a bed and breakfast for the night. This stone church was ancient with thick slab pews, hand carved on the ends; an intimidating pulpit, and dates in numerous places. In the middle of the sanctuary was a solid rock Baptismal Font dated 1218.

I then realized that my ancestors had been baptized from that font. That each of them, like myself, had been named a Child of God. It was one of those moving moments in life that I remember as if I was standing there this moment. I was so overwhelmed by the whole experience, that my friend finally had to come and take me away. The feeling of being in such a time worn place of my history, was for that hour, a feeling like I had found my place in time and space.

The importance of Baptism in our lives is the opportunity to be reminded that we are washed clean of sin and will always be recognized as a Child of God, just as Jesus was. In the act of Holy Communion, we remember

who Christ is; in the act of Baptism we claim who we are. Remembering who we are, is as important as remembering who Christ is.

Often in our daily lives we forget who we are as God's Creation and Disciples. Baptism marks us as a member of one family. It is a gift that often is granted by someone else: a parent or sponsor. In infant Baptism they are the ones who bring us forward to be Baptized. At Confirmation we confirm that we are ready, by accepting their gift and take over the responsibility for our belief and faith in God. From then on we can confirm our faith over and over in our lives.

Every time we see water, we should have a moment of thanksgiving for the power it has to keep us physically alive, and thanksgiving for our place in God's Kingdom as a Child of God. As I looked over the hymns for today and chose the first one that we sang, the title vibrated to my soul. How many of you have a child, teen, young adult or adult, that you pray, will one of these days remember that they are a Child of God?"

Many people aren't connected with a church family. Many say they are Spiritual, but not interested in church. How will we reach them? Not by insisting that they come to this building and experience worship in the way we like it. It is time to explore new ways to remind them of who they are. Not by stopping what we do here, but by finding new ways to help them find Christian Community beyond our doors in a way that it will touch their hearts. Wash, O God, our Sons and Daughters...that is a prayer to be echoed throughout the church buildings and way beyond.

In today's scripture, Peter's witness is casual, yet powerful. *Peter said, "I really am learning that God doesn't show partiality to one group of people over another. Rather, in every nation, whoever worships God and does what is right is acceptable to God. This is the message of peace he sent to the Israelites by proclaiming the good news through Jesus Christ: He is Lord of all!"*

Please note that Peter's concept of worship 2000 years ago, was very different from ours. Yet he recalls the baptisms that John shared with the people of that day, including Jesus, and how the new understanding of faith grew from there. John used water to help the witness of God's presence spread through the people.

Just as every time we eat, we should thank God and remember Jesus, every time we see or touch water it can be a reminder of who we are as the children of God. When Martin Luther felt discouraged or afraid, he'd often splash water on himself and declare, "But I am Baptized!"

Even so, because we are a forgetful people, we have sacraments in the church to help us remember: Holy Communion and Baptism. Baptism happens only once for each of us, yet it takes a lifetime to complete. Rev. Chip Andrus a Presbyterian Pastor says this about the church he serves: *"People used to describe death as 'Well, they passed on.' Now people say their grandmother has 'completed her baptism.' That they are willing to say this, unprompted, lets us know that deep down, they are starting to understand baptism as more than an event."*

Just as with Communion, Baptism has a formula of acts leading to it, to help us remember its meaning. We confess, we profess, we bless and then we receive. Our confession is a reminder that we are not perfect. God already knows that, but we need to be reminded... All that is required is for us to be open with an honest heart.

Our profession is a statement of what we believe. Vows of renouncing evil powers and promising to live as Christ's representatives in the world are all part of that. This morning we will say the Traditional Apostles Creed. It is another thing that we sometimes forget, what we really believe in. The water will then be blessed, a reminder of the importance of water for all living things.

At a Baptism, the baptized is touched by the water, on the forehead, poured over the head or by full immersion. There is no Baptism today, but we will take time to remember our Baptisms. In the United Methodist Church. Baptism is a means of new birth in Jesus Christ and a mark of Christian Discipleship.

Baptism is not about the church building or any particular font. It is about the faith community, the church family surrounding, supporting and encouraging us when we have forgotten who we are. Jesus had John and all who were baptized with him as his community. Then he went out choosing disciples from that community to follow, learn and eventually to be the ones to tell the story of God that Jesus brought to earth for us.

We are going to remember our Baptism in two ways this morning: First, I will talk you through with a guided imagery; second you will be invited forward to experience the water. You may not be able to remember your own Baptism, but you may have witnessed many within the church family.

Find a comfortable position where you are sitting and relax. Let your worries or fears flow from you as rainwater flows from the roof of a house. Though you may not have been old enough to remember your baptism, use your imagination to go back to the day of your baptism and picture it in your mind's eye.

Picture a church setting, either the actual church where you were baptized or one that you create in your imagination right now. Picture the worship setting in which your baptism takes place, perhaps a church service or maybe just a large family gathering.

Imagine yourself as small and being held in the arms of someone you trust. It might be your mother or father, a godparent or anyone that you would want to hold you. Feel how good it is to be held securely by someone who holds you well, someone you trust.

Think of the people you would like to be there, people you know now as well as people who would have known you then. You can decide who should be there. Select people who have nurtured and sustained you in your identity as a Child of God. Imagine them all surrounding the font or place of baptism as part of a large family gathering.

Imagine the pastor that you would like to baptize you. It can be the person who actually did baptize you or it can be a pastor of your own choosing, someone you know now or someone in the past who is a wisdom figure for you.

Feel the touch on your forehead as the water touches you. Feel the water being poured over your head, or imagine what it might be like to be fully immersed in water. Hear the words that are spoken as the water flows over your body: "I baptize you in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit."

Feel the cleansing that comes with the washing of the water and the promise of forgiveness. Hear the words of promise assuring you that nothing that could possibly happen to you would ever leave you all alone. Sense the presence of the risen Christ all around you. Sense that presence flowing in you and through you until you can say, "It's no longer I who live but Christ who lives in me."

Feel the energy of the new life that is God's gift to you. Feel its power. Feel the safety, the security, and the reassurance that comes with the experience of being baptized. Imagine yourself being held securely by the everlasting arms of God as you listen to a voice speaking in the same soothing tone that a mother would use with her child: "You are baptized. You are baptized. Nothing can separate you from my love which is in Christ and embedded deeply within you. You are baptized. You are my beloved child. I will always be with you."

As you feel ready, return from this experience to where we are now, feeling refreshed and renewed by the healing waters of your baptism.