

Call to Worship

By your baptism you have been grafted into the family of God, and become royal priests, Gods own people ordained for ministry in the name of Jesus Christ.

Remembering our baptism into union with Christ Jesus and our participation in Christ's mission, we come to praise and worship God.

Prayer of Invocation

God, we are here to worship you and to give thanks for being chosen and named your beloved children, baptized into Christ and called into Christian vocation. It is amazing that in your great design for life there is a specific purpose for each of us, a certain service that is ours to do for the sake of Christ. Help us to sense this anew, and recommit ourselves to your loving will. Amen.

The Word Mark 1:4-11 The Message

John the Baptizer appeared in the wild, preaching a baptism of life-change that leads to forgiveness of sins.

People thronged to him from Judea and Jerusalem and, as they confessed their sins, were baptized by him in the Jordan River into a changed life.

John wore a camel-hair habit, tied at the waist with a leather belt. He ate locusts and wild field honey. As he preached he said, "The real action comes next: The star in this drama, to whom I'm a mere stagehand, will change your life.

I'm baptizing you here in the river, turning your old life in for a kingdom life. His baptism—a holy baptism by the Holy Spirit—will change you from the inside out."

At this time, Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. The moment he came out of the water, he saw the sky split open and God's Spirit, looking like a dove, come down on him.

Along with the Spirit, a voice: "You are my Son, chosen and marked by my love, pride of my life."

Living the Word

Today is Baptism of the Lord Sunday. It is acknowledged on the Christian calendar the week after epiphany each year. The scriptures tell us that Jesus was baptized as an adult at the beginning of this ministry. United Methodist's often baptize babies, but also adults. Why babies? Baptism is a gift from God, we are given by our parents or guardians.

There is a scene in the movie 'City of Ember' when Doon receives an odd gift from his father that appears to be of no use.

As the father hands his teenage son a bottle cap he says: "Here, it's for you." Doon looks confused and says, "Ahh, What's it for?" The father replies "You'll figure it out. There's more to a bottle cap than keeping the liquid from leaking out of glass."

After a long pause he goes on: "The main thing is – pay attention. Notice what no one else notices and you'll know what no one else knows. What you get is what you get."

After a moment Doon just says: "Real useful Dad." And he walks out.

There is more to Baptism than just water on the head...What you get is what you get... we have to make the most of what we receive. Baptism was given us – before we understood at all, many of us as babies. But we have to decide what we will get out of this gift.

"Real useful Dad." It is difficult to receive things that seem useless to us at the time. But it is true that wisdom and understanding take time. Much of that time, our time, is just common time, waiting and paying attention.

Most of us grow up remembering our baptism through watching other babies being baptized and named as a 'Child of God'. We see the parent's joy, the babies misunderstanding of the water being poured on its head, the community of faith saying the words of acknowledgement that they will surround the child with love and make a place for them in God's church.

As we hear the words said at anyone's baptism we should also take it for ourselves. Hear this today: All children are 'Children of God'. It is a part of what the Creator has given us in the beginning. Baptized or not. Even so, we need to hear the words said to us over and over again: "You are a child of God!"

Since 1997, when I began serving my first churches, I have baptized 90 babies, children and adults. Each one was special for the families and for me. Several stories stand out to me and there is meaning in sharing them this morning.

My first baptisms were two sisters from the same family. I had only been at Birchwood Church for 5 months and I was still getting to know people. The younger sister, Erin was a busy three-year-old so her father decided to hold her. I baptized the older sister Wendy first – all went well...

When it was Erin's turn, she decided that she didn't want what her sister had just gotten and she swung away from me. Her father wiggled her back a couple of times. After two missed attempts I finally said, loud enough for them both to hear. Hold on, we are going to do this and I did get some water on her head.

I went home thinking I was not very good at being a pastor. First Baptism note to self – Age 3 is not the best age for baptism, so be sure to build a relationship with the one to be baptized before you begin.

In 2005, Wausau First UMC, Baptisms #33 & 34 were two 12-year-old girls who were in a Confirmation class of 15 students that hadn't been baptized as infants. As we talked about the United Methodist practice of infant baptism, they were disappointed that it hadn't happened for them. One

of them was really upset that she they had been Dedicated as a baby, not baptized. That was a common practice in a few other denominations.

If I remember correctly, she went home and scolded her parents for making her go through this new trauma at this point in her life. I assured them both that the church had been surrounding them all of their lives and that they too, were already children of God. We did the baptisms as part of the Confirmation Service and it went seamlessly. Note to self: Pre-teens always need more attention and care as they are coming of age. Maybe I am getting a little better at this...

Three years later, Eau Claire: Lake Street Church, there was a shy boy Confirmand that said that he didn't want to be Confirmed. I quietly pulled him aside and asked why, he said he had never been baptized.

I told him about others who had been in the same situation and how we had handled it, yet he was so painfully shy he didn't want to be singled out on Confirmation Day. So we invited his parents to class and we went into the chapel and he was baptized there, surrounded by his classmates and friends along with his family. Note to self: I need to continue to work at understand introverts.

We hope that as youth, a time will come when that same child will accept for themselves the gift given them at Baptism. That is what Confirmation year and Confirmation Sunday is about. Exposing each person to enough experiences and teachings to make them ready to accept the gift for themselves. To confirm their own faith in God.

2013, New Richmond United Methodist Church. Right across the street from the front door of the church was an old Victorian house, turned Bed & Breakfast, inhabited by an 'unwed' couple so I was told... that were in their forties...They did not attend church at first, but some major events changed in their lives and they began to attend.

One day they came to see me and said they had decided to be married. They wanted a small wedding in the living room of their house. Would I do the service?. We then began some pre-marriage time together. As I asked about their lives and their faith in God, Lon told me he had never been baptized.

When I asked him why he said it just never had happened for him. Then he quickly asked, "Can we do it right now?" I assured him he was already a child of God, but he insisted that he now wanted to be baptized. And so I got a bowl and a towel and I blessed the water and he cried as I put some on his head and named him a child of God. After he hugged me so tight for this gift God had given him.

Note to self: seize the moment if you feel the Holy Spirit there with you. Realization: We have to meet each person when they are ready and this has nothing to do with me and all about the Holy Spirit no matter when and who it is for. A month later the neighbors were married and no more negative was said as those neighbors became friends and a part of the church.

One year later an Adult Church Member came to me after Confirmation Sunday to say she had been Baptized, yet she never had Confirmation Classes and could she join the next class in the fall. It is never too late to Confirm or re-confirm your faith. Note to self: There are many people who did not have Christian instruction enough to be ready at any point to confirm their faith.

In the movie 'Holiday for Love' Noel gives her mother a Christmas present that they can no longer afford. Her mother tells her to take it back. You can see the hurt on Noel's face as her gift is rejected.

How must God feel when we ignore this gift given to us at Baptism and never confirm our faith or only confirmed it at one point on our life journey?

You don't have to take a church class to confirm your faith in God. Yet you can, in fact Bible study class is a good place to begin. And you should be able to confirm your faith in God over and over in your life.

That is what Baptism of the Lord Sunday is – an opportunity to acknowledge your Baptism – that you are and always have been a Child of God. And to reconfirm your faith in a God that is always there for you. So many times in life we are distracted from our relationship with God. Sometimes we actually turn away from God for other things. This Sunday is a reminder that we can find our way back.

That is why the church is here: to offer you bottle caps or grape juice or Bibles or Baptism of the Lord Sundays to help you find your way to a point of confirmation of your faith in God. The church will point to Christ and his baptism – where God said "You are my child, chosen and marked by my love, pride of my life."

So what we ultimately need to know is that it is about our relationship with God and our relationship with each other. We need each other to get what we can get together.

Getting it...One of the ways the church helps us connect to each other and to God is through Baptism, a gift from God given to us by the example of Christ, through those who love us enough to bring us to the water. Together we can keep 'getting it' beginning as a baby or when we are older and able to understand for ourselves.

Now, what does it mean to be a 'Child of God?' In Our scripture this morning, John the Baptist told the people: "*I'm baptizing you here in the river, turning your old life in for a kingdom life. Jesus' baptism – a holy baptism by the Holy Spirit – will change you from the inside out.*" John preached a baptism of repentance and forgiveness, to help you face who you are and turn you around to be able to see who God sees you can be.

In the Book of Acts chapter 2, verse 38, Peter says: "*Change your hearts and lives. Each of you must be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. Then you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.*"

Let me tell you what Baptism has done for me. Every morning as I go from bed to my shower and I am given the water to wash me clean through Christ. Then the water brings sparks of new epiphanies – new ideas via the Holy Spirit. In simpler words, it clears my head and starts me thinking. Some of my best sermons, children's messages and newspaper articles began in the shower.

What can Baptism do for you? Ask for an awakening. Acknowledge yourself as God's Child. Be ready and able to do God's will. A holy baptism by the Holy Spirit – it will change you from the inside out! Note to self: **I** am a child of God! Now repeat after me:

**"I am a child of God! Lord, clear my head and heart,
to make me ready, to live as your child, and to do your good will. Amen."**