

Washed Clean
January 11, 2009
Pastor Michael Cofer

Mark 1:4-11

Since I wasn't here last week, let me just start off this way: Welcome to the Year of our Lord 2009. New years is always a wonderful time. A time for reflection, but also a time for Hope. It's a time to look forward. A time to experience a new beginning, a fresh start.

That's what New Year's Resolutions are all about, isn't it? A clean slate and a resolve to do it right this time around. I think December 31st is possibly the most optimistic day of the whole year, and it's so cool to think that almost everyone in the world is sharing in your hope and desires for a better tomorrow. And so, I think it is so appropriate that we celebrate the Baptism of Jesus so early in our calendar year.

As far as I can see, Baptism is all about new beginnings. But before we get into the fine details, let's talk broadly about baptism so we're all on the same page.

What happens in baptism? Well, the things that we can see aren't all that marvelous. The pastor stands in front of the church and does a bit of talking. The person being baptized answers a few questions, or if they are too young to speak for themselves there are responsible adults who speak for them. Then, the pastor scoops some water on the baptizee, and it's over.

I hope you'll pardon a bit of irreverence, but that's not a whole lot different than going to the hair salon. There's a bit of introduction, they ask if you'd like to have your hair washed, and if you say yes, they splash some water on your head.

And in a way, the correlation makes sense. For us “Baptism” is a very specific thing, but in the Greek language from which we get the word, Baptism just means “Washing.” Just plain old washing.

So why do we make such a big deal about washing people’s heads in church? It’s the things that we can’t see that make it a big deal. Jesus took this simple action of washing and transformed it into something no less than miraculous.

The picture from today’s reading is striking... no.... that’s not strong enough. It is breathtaking. Try to imagine it. Jesus goes into the river and when he is washed by John, the sky opens up, and through the whole in the sky there is a window into heaven. Can you picture it? The glory of God visible punching through our atmosphere and bathing Jesus in its light. And then, the Holy Spirit hidden in the shape of a dove, but somehow unmistakably God, drifts downward with unworldly grace and lands upon Jesus.

And then the voice of the Father like the rumbling of thunder resounded across the riverside, “This is my Son whom I love. With Him I am well pleased.” And in that moment, the whole trinity was manifest, the fullness of God physically present with everyday Joes like you and me.

Can you imagine what it would have been like to be there that day? How life changing would that be?

Alright, now put yourself in that river with John. What would you feel if God himself descended to rest upon you? What if His voice from heaven spoke to You and said, “This is my beloved Child, with whom I am well pleased?”

People spend their whole lives chasing fame and power and relationships looking for that kind of validation. It is such a simple and profound statement, and if we take it for its full value it will change our lives for the better. You are God's Child.

I suppose Jesus' baptism is a little different from ours, because he didn't bring the weight of sin into the water. He was God's Child from the time of his birth. We carry baggage into the water that Jesus did not. We all have histories we'd rather be forgotten. How was your look back on 2008? Do you have regrets? Embarrassments?

So, there are some mysteries about why He was baptized. There are some questions about what was happening in His baptism, but I think one part of it that he made clear what to expect when *we* are baptized.

You went into the water a sinner, and you came out a child of God. You went in dirty, but you were washed clean. Martin Luther commends us to remember our baptism every morning when we wash our face. Why? Because the fresh start that is offered in baptism is a *DAILY* reality. It reminds us that we can lay down our emotional and spiritual baggage, and embrace our membership in God's Family.

That is the sort of anchor that can hold you fast through the worst of life's storms. This world can take away our wealth, our health, and the waves of uncertainty can rail and rage and crash against our hull until kingdom come, it won't change a thing. You belong to God, and nothing – NOTHING – in this world or the next can change that fact.

And what kind of God do we have? The kind that wants to be known as "Daddy." Almighty? You bet. Awe-inspiring? Fearsome? Yes sir. Impossibly deep, wide, and wise beyond comprehension? Without a doubt. But at the end of the day, he's Our

Father, and we are his beloved Children. The idea of a “gentle giant,” is a vast understatement.

That is the comfort and the hope and the peace that comes from being a baptized child of God. And every morning, when you’re shaving and showering and fixing your hair in the bathroom mirror, give that guy or gal that’s looking back at you a smile. Look them straight in the eye and say, “It’s going to be a great day, because you are the child of a great God.”

That’s not wishful thinking, guys; that’s a statement of faith. And faith is when we expect as fact things that we can’t see. But, you better believe it’s also a true statement, because whatever this life, this world, or the devil himself tries to throw at you today, you can be sure that God will see you through it, and when the day ends he’ll tuck you into bed, and be there to wake you up tomorrow.

May the God of fresh starts and of lives washed clean, our Beloved Father, grant you the peace, and the hope, and the joy that surpasses all understanding, until at last you are resting in Him. AMEN.