



**THE BAPTISM OF OUR LORD  
JANUARY 10, 2021  
MARK 1: 4-11  
"TRUST"**

And so John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. The whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem went out to him. Confessing their sins, they were baptized by him in the Jordan River. John wore clothing made of camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. And this was his message: "After me comes the one more powerful than I, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. I baptize you with[a] water, but he will baptize you with[b] the Holy Spirit." At that time Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. Just as Jesus was coming up out of the water, he saw heaven being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased."

**SERMON**

Hey, everyone. We're beginning a new year, so let's look at how life unfolds within a faith perspective.

This word "faith" comes with a good deal of baggage. So let's bring faith into a more contemporary understanding by exchanging the word faith for the word trust.

Martin Luther made this switch 500 years ago, but I'm not sure all of us have gotten the message.

The change in language is critical because the matter of trust or the lack thereof is with us from birth. From the moment of our first gulp of air, we are thrust into our own individual experience of life.

So it is that some congregations initiate their infants into the great stream of Christian history through the sacrament of baptism.

Baptism is the sacrament of trust for the journey of life.

When the pastor takes the child from the parents, he or she symbolically is handing the infant over to god.

Let me pause for a moment and speak about sacraments.

Three things must be present for an act to be sacramental.

- First, Jesus said to do it. At the end of the gospel of Matthew, Jesus tells the disciples to go and baptize.
- Second, that there is a promise of god attached to the action.
  - Through baptism, we are revealed as children of the god of the universe. This first initiation into the sacred journey of life places our life within the embrace of the holy spirit.



- Baptism declares that god is in our corner for a lifetime. God is trustworthy.
- And we have the promise that our life will continue into the next life.
- Third, there must be an earthly element involved and in baptism we have water.

Sacraments join spiritual realities to material realities.

Baptism reveals to us that we do not have to call upon the presence of god who is out there somewhere, but that we live within the presence—the very being of god—all of our life.

Billy Joel wrote the song, lullaby, about his daughter he fathered with Christie Brinkley.

Lullaby

The song, lullaby, focuses on the issue of trust. Billy Joel and christie Brinkley went through a divorce and their daughter, Alexa Ray, is being reassured that her father will be there with her despite the divorce:

“I promised I would never leave you and you always should know wherever you may go, no matter where you are, I never will be far away.”

But, as with all of us, we may not be able to keep the promises we make. Life is bigger than our intentions and our hope.

The theme of trust arises for all of us within the slings and arrows of life. We all are wounded in our early years and carry these wounds the rest of our lives. Our wounds influence our decisions as we grow up. Our wounds can be sacred wounds as we go through life. Our wounds become grist for the mill in our adolescence. In early adulthood, we rework the early stages of life, revisiting key issues along the way

It is time for another initiation.

Growin' up

God comes to us as our life. As late adolescents or young adults, we work to find our place in the world.

Can we trust our choices? Are there trustworthy mentors and friends who help show us the way? Can we trust the world and trust the god in whose presence we live?

Erik Erikson explored the stages of life and named two tasks we all must face as young adults.

First, what will we do with our time? What contributions do we hope to make in our life? What are we naturally good at doing? What kind of work will be satisfying and enlivening?

Hopefully, we don't just work a job. We want to find a calling. A calling means that our work flows out of connection to the presence of god surrounding us.

Second, can we find a trustworthy someone to share life with us?



It's as if we are re-working the foundation created in our childhood so that we can find our way forward.

That baptismal event reminds us that we are making our choices within the framework of living within the divine presence....

In today's world, there is no way to escape anxiety. The pandemic certainly teaches us that.

The landmines are all around. No more is it boy meets girl and let's get married. It is no longer go to college or trade school and jobs will be waiting just for you.

Student debt, lack of meaningful and productive work, the fluidity of identity, the dysfunction present in so many families, the loss of trust in god and the church, the pandemic. Life can be so scary—so disappointing, so meaningless.

The result is the presence of anxiety in one form or another falls on all of us.

Anxiety

Anxiety is the soul's signal that we cannot hold ourselves together psychologically and spiritually. Whatever is happening to us is too much.

Anxiety is the soul's signal that we are on the verge of falling apart. And when we fall apart we move into rage or a crying jag. We fall into dangerous psychological fantasies.

We will do anything to not fall to pieces. We can understand the use of addictive substances and processes as the way we try to keep ourselves together.

When we are gripped by anxiety, our world becomes very small. It's as if we have on blinders that keep us from having a more expansive perspective.

In the old testament, the Hebrew world for salvation has to do with spaciousness.

Because the Israelite had been slaves in Egypt, trapped in a foreign land, they experienced salvation as wide-open spaces.

And this is what trust can do for us: restore us to a spacious life.

One friend may do it. A community like clc may do it. A spouse may do it. Going for a run. Sitting in silent prayer. Reading a book. Helping someone else. Appropriate medication.

But we all must find a collection of people around us who help keep us together psychologically and spiritually.



A faith community is only worth its salt if its people are working for something bigger than they are. A faith community is only worth its salt if it remains a safe, non-violent, humble group of people who prove themselves trustworthy.

Why are more and more people wanting nothing to do with the church?

Because we have not proven ourselves to be trustworthy. Growing numbers of people do not find Christian communities places of integrity. Instead, we in the church too often betray trust by being communities of conflict. Places where we do live as mature spiritual people. We are often more judgmental and less accepting of people than the general population.

We must learn to live with anxiety

And if that isn't enough of a challenge, along comes the midlife transition

Anthem

For the sake of discussion, let's say midlife begins at age forty.

This is the time when our baptized life rises with some force.

At midlife, it is a blessing if we experience that we are going to die. Not an intellectual acknowledgement, but that we feel this truth in our bones: "I am going to die."

That realization helps us look at our life: do we want the next forty years to look like our previous forty years, or do we need to make some changes.

That we come to know what Leonard Cohen writes in his song, anthem: there's a crack in everything.

So we rework what needs repair at midlife.

There's a crack in everything, but that's how the light gets in.

Here, we may initiate a change in career. Here we may face that our earlier selection of a partner in life is now lifeless.

Often, we must rework our relationship with god.

Rather than the authority of the church or the priest/pastor, we begin to experience inner authority.

Our spiritual life undergoes a dying and rising, so that we are more present to the presence in which we live

At midlife we need an awakening that pushes us under the waters of baptism so we come out of the waters with greater depth as a person of trust.



Even if we rework aspects of our life, eventually we must face that there are more years behind than are in front of us.

In our elder years, we find death becoming more real. Our body may begin to fail us or our memory. We may face that we did not accomplish all that we wanted to in our life. Friends die. More and more people on the obituary page are not much older than we are,

Warren Zevon, facing an imminent death from lung cancer, recorded his final album, often only being able to sing a phrase at a time. This song was on his final album.

Keep me in your heart

In our elder years, we can turn our full attention on those around us. Spiritually, we find our ego loosening and rest more fully in the divine presence around us. The spiritual life is really just for adults. Children can't adequately handle the holy. So, in a sense, we want to experience one foot in this life and one foot in the next. If we have learned to trust, then we deepen into trusting that life will go on in a way after death that only god knows.

When I go away

Levin Helm, the drummer for the band, sang this song. Levin is dead now.

But it's a gracious perspective about crossing over the boundary into the next life.

If we have been blessed to have had experiences of the divine presence which surrounds us, then we can die with grace and peace.

The god who sustained us in life; the god who revealed himself to us in the waters of baptism; the god who was our companion in our life's journey is with us as we go away.

God has been trustworthy throughout life.

A person dear to me who died recently, said on his deathbed, "I'm eager to find out what heaven has prepared for me."

May we grow in trusting the unseen god, the seen son, Jesus, the presence of the spirit, in trusting our own life.

Wonderful world