

You are the beloved

Baptism of Jesus C—January 13, 2019

[This transcript was meant for a spoken performance. It is not optimized for a reading experience.]

*I'm going down to the river to wash my soul again
I've been runnin' with the Devil, and I know he's not my Friend*

—Doug Seegers, Going Down To The River

Many of you here this morning have been baptized. Today, we are about to celebrate the sacrament of baptism as we welcome Ross Galloway into the Christian movement.

How many of you remember being baptized?

I do. I remember being baptized. Well, I remember the second baptism. That is correct. Feast your eyes upon me! I have been super saved through the waters of baptism.

When confirmation was going to happen, way back when I wanted to be confirmed, I was a member of St. Ambrose Roman Catholic Church and I wanted to be confirmed. I wanted to make a semi-adult—who am I kidding? I was 16 and, at 16, I wanted to make an informed consent to be confirmed and to reaffirm my baptism.

The only problem: I was told my baptism was not recognized by the Roman Church, my church.

I was baptized the first time as a baby in 1957 in a little country church called Glen Morris United Church.

I was baptized in the name of the father, the son and the Holy Spirit.

Father Pautler (that was my parish priest) said that my baptism was not legitimate. I was apparently not legitimate; my baby baptism didn't count. Not because I was a baby; (the Roman Catholic Church baptized babies) I was not legitimate because I was baptized in a United Church. I had to be "redone".

I didn't mind being illegitimate. I didn't mind being baptized again: I got presents, I got gifts.

To be honest, I could have been super, super, super saved through baptism because I almost got baptized again earlier.

Remember my stories of flying squirrels and talking parrots at a Baptist Church? Baptists know how to baptize. Baptists have pools! Baptists don't sprinkle waters—Baptists plunge you deep into the pool of water until you are completely submerged like you saw in the Gospel video today.

I thought the baptismal tanks at Forward Baptist Church were just as cool as, say, the flying squirrel.

Wait—that squirrel didn't really fly, so let me change the cool factor. The squirrel was... neat. The pool—now that was cool!

I think baptismal rituals are beautiful, no matter how or where one is baptized, no matter if it is the mere touch of water droplets or full-on emersion. There is something intimate and personal when someone asks for the sacrament of baptism.

Let's go back to the late first-century storyteller Luke. Luke, like the other Gospel writers, has included the baptism story of Jesus. Luke is speaking to his community and its followers.

Luke's story is short. The mention of baptism is brief: *"Now when all the people were baptized, and when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, the heavens were opened"* That is all. One sentence is all Luke needs to write. One sentence that says a lot.

Jesus goes down to the river. This is a powerful image. The son of God is going down to the river, the river that John is baptizing in. Jesus surrenders to the experience. Jesus stands in a stream of people with courage, personal flaws, competing interests and fragile heroism.

Luke places Jesus in this line to remind the listener that Jesus was born from, as well into, a world of systems. Jesus' baptism is a signal that Jesus understood the full implication of the incarnation.

Jesus gets it.

Gets what?

That he is a part of the system, he is a part of the culture, he is a part of the family.

Jesus is not doing what many projected that Jesus should do, because, after all, he is the Son of God.

Jesus was not merely identifying with, or showing solidarity with, the human world. Jesus was fully acknowledging its tragic structure.

There are no innocent.

No perfect.

No controllable.

No sinless.

Jesus goes down to the river as one who gets this. Jesus stands as one of them. Jesus stands as one of us.

Do you understand how radical Luke's writing is? Luke is writing about the Messiah. The late first-century Messiah. The community is trying to figure out who this Messiah was. It won't be until another 200 or so years after Luke that a creed would be written, a generally-agreed upon statement.

"I believe in God the Father almighty, etc., etc." is the Nicene creed that comes after Luke, way after Luke.

We proclaim and pronounce that we live in God's world.

Those are our words, a New Creed, trying to make meaning of who God is, who Jesus is, and where is the Spirit that we call Holy.

Go back to the first century and notice what was written again. Notice the imagery, notice the symbolism in the writing:

Now when all the people were baptized, and when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying,

Jesus was praying. And then what happens?

the heavens were opened, and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form, like a dove; and a voice came from heaven, "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased."

Can you feel the impact of that last sentence? You are my Son, you are my daughter. You are the Beloved. With you I am well pleased.

Luke is telling the listener about the connection. Jesus and God are connected. Earth-walker and Divine are related.

Do you get that? Earth walker, Human with all that being human entails:

good,

blessed,

bad,

really bad,

broken,

hurting,

destroying,

suffering,

fearful,

secretive

...is connected, is related to the Divine to God.

Luke places Jesus in line of going down to the river to pray so that you can understand that he is you. He is you. Jesus is you. Divine is you. Is one with you—or, to use a later theological word, he is the atonement. Jesus is at one with.

How often do you forget that you are at one with God?

How can you be reminded that you are one with God?

How often do you allow yourself to go down to the river, go down to wherever you need to go down to and be reminded Luke's words?

"You are my [...] beloved; with you I am well pleased."

No matter what you have done,
no matter what you are doing,
no matter where you are in your life,
Stop.

Just stop and, for one teeny-tiny moment, hear those words again: *"You are my beloved. I am the beloved and God is pleased with me."*

Jesus surrenders and begins. No matter where he has come from, he surrenders and begins.

No matter what you have done, what is offered then is offered now. Surrender. Surrender, let go of the past. Let go of the past, bow down, come up and begin again.

The song we began says:

*I'm going down to the river to wash my soul again
I've been falling by the wayside
I'm going out to the country, to bury my head in a creek
I'm gonna jump into that water,
Going down to the river, gonna wash my soul again.*

"You are the beloved, the Beloved; with you, God is pleased." Baptized or not baptized, the message is the same: you are the beloved, with you God is pleased. The message doesn't get better than this because this is good news indeed.