

January 11, 2009
By Rick Moynes
“Hot dog, hot dog!”

I wish to thank you for the opportunity to lead worship this morning. I'm currently participating in the course “So You Think You Can Preach”. This course is organized by Presbytery running from September until April. We've heard some inspiring speakers give insight on topics like the Old Testament, the New Testament, how to preach and the history of the church. Each of us has the opportunity to prepare a sermon and deliver it during the course. The preparation for today's service has been beneficial in my applying points learned during my course.

Exodus 4: 10-12 reads:

Moses said to the Lord, “O Lord, I have never been eloquent, neither in the past nor since you have spoken to your servant. I am slow of speech and tongue.” The Lord said to him, “Who gives man his mouth? Who makes him deaf or mute? Who gives him sight or makes him blind? Is it not I, the Lord? Now go; I will help you speak and will teach you what to say.” It's a humbling and rewarding experience to stand before you today and is only possible with prayer and direction from God.

The story goes that Paul and Jesus were playing a round of golf one day. Jesus prepared to tee off using a nine iron. Paul suggested “Lord, I would use a different club if I were you. You should use your driver. The water hazard is close enough that you won't get over it with the nine iron. Tiger Woods is likely the only guy who could clear that water hazard with a nine iron.” Jesus replied “If Tiger Woods can do it then I can do it.” Jesus took his shot and it landed in the middle of the water hazard. Jesus went down the fairway and when he reached the water he walked out on the water and reached down to pick up his ball. Then Jesus walked back to the tee and prepared to tee off with that same nine iron. Paul stopped him and said “Lord, please be patient with me, but I already told you if you use the nine iron you won't be able to clear the water. You've hit it once and you didn't hit it far enough. You should be using your driver.” But Jesus went ahead and hit the ball. Again the ball didn't clear the water and landed in the middle of the pond. Like the first time, Jesus walked to the water's edge then across the water and stooped down to pick up his ball. Just then another group of golfers came along and saw Jesus walking on the water. Shocked by what they were seeing one of them said “Who does he think he is? Jesus Christ.” Paul replied “No, he is Jesus Christ, but he thinks he's Tiger Woods.” In the life of Jesus, water plays an important recurring and symbolic role. I will be speaking about the baptism of Jesus, today.

The season of Christmas is over. We've celebrated the birth of Jesus in our traditional services of carol singing and reading the Christmas story from the gospels. The children have reenacted the Christmas story in a pageant. I hope you were all able to take the time to visit with your family and friends. May you be recharged spiritually as you reflect on that all important first step of Jesus life, his birth in the lowly stable. His birth is only the beginning of Jesus time on earth. Over the year in the church we go on to talk about Jesus baptism and the beginning of his ministry, his many years carrying out his ministry, his death and his resurrection.

We don't know much about the early years of Jesus life. We read in the Bible that for his first thirty

years Jesus was a carpenter. The book of Mark jumps over these first years and begins with Jesus baptism. Other than the one incident in the synagogue at the age of twelve, recorded by Luke, we don't know anything else. He was leading a rather ordinary life going to work every morning and returning home each night not unlike what many of us have done in our own lives. The Sabbath was the day he attended the synagogue.

Jesus friends and coworkers probably thought they knew who he was. They had worked along with him as he performed his duties as a carpenter. It must have taken people by surprise when Jesus announced that he was going to be baptized as the long awaited Messiah. Although the old testament prophets told of a Messiah to come, and the people had long awaited this Messiah, very few people yet understood that Jesus was this Messiah. Like the foursome of golfers, his friends may have asked each other "Who does he think he is?" However, Jesus had known all along that the day would come when he would be called to be baptized and begin his ministry on earth.

Jesus cousin John would baptize him in the Jordan River. The river has changed considerably over the last 2000 years. Today, due to the human impact on the river, it has been reduced to a muddy stream in places. Seventy to ninety percent of the water is used for human consumption. The concern is great enough that in 2007 the river was included on the list of the world's one hundred most endangered ecological sites. Long ago the river was very different. In Genesis 13:10 we read "Lot looked up and saw that the whole plain of the Jordan was well watered, like the garden of the Lord." This doesn't depict a muddy stream but rather a green oasis as the river runs through the desert. Through the gospels we read often of Jesus crossing the Jordan in his travels and returning to the river for times of peace and tranquility.

John the baptist had chosen to carry out his work along the river. He is the one described in the book of Isaiah 40:3 "In the desert prepare the way for the Lord; make straight in the wilderness a highway for our God." John knew he would be the one to baptize Jesus as the Messiah. He lived a simple life in the desert to allow him to focus on God's work. The Bible states, "John wore clothing of camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist and he ate locusts and honey." This was in direct contrast to the religious leaders in the city. The flowing robes worn by these people were meant to show the distinction owed them because of their position.

John would preach to the people that they needed to change their lives and be baptized. When he preached he would tell them that one far greater than he would come and baptize them with the Holy Spirit. "After me will come one more powerful than I, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. I baptize you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit." A baptism by John was preparing the people to accept Christ. His baptism was one of repentance. The Greek word for baptism means "to wash". John was washing people in the Jordan River. When they came confessing, and repenting of their sins, he would wash them in the river to confirm their choice to turn away from sin and begin the change coming in their lives.

In Matthew we continue to read "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'm well pleased." The spirit of God had descended on Jesus in the form of a dove. The dove descending from above demonstrates that Jesus' power was from above, from Almighty God. John had predicted this result. He had said "Jesus would come and baptize with the Holy Spirit".

When Jesus baptizes with the Holy Spirit, we are transformed by the power. Not only does He offer us forgiveness for our sins but He gives us the strength and guidance to live for Him. Without this power the lights in our lives won't come on. We all know that a source of energy is required to turn on the lights when entering a room. We often do it without thinking about it even when the hydro is out. Even after realizing this, sometimes we'll flick the switch a couple of times in an attempt to make the light work.

For our lives to shine we need a connection to the teachings of Jesus. He is the way to tap into the main conduit. Jesus lived as he did because he was full of the spiritual direction from God. His light shone brightly because the power was on. The Spirit of God is the real source for this power. Jesus lived and still lives in us as that spiritual strength. There is no portable generator available to provide back up support. We can't live a Christian life without Jesus. The only way to live a Christian life is to accept Jesus into our lives as the sole source of the Spiritual power from above.

In the Old Testament lesson this morning we read from Genesis that "the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters." The universe needed a source of power. God is that source. Genesis goes on "And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. God had plugged the universe into its never ending power source.

If John's baptism was to repent and turn away from sin why was Jesus baptized? He was sinless. Many scholars have debated this question and offered answers. Some of these answers include He was baptized: 1) to identify with us as humans and our sin 2) to provide an example for us to follow 3) to support his cousin John's ministry and 4) to begin his ministry and bring his message of salvation to all the people. His baptism was the obvious sign that God was now calling him into service.

In our church baptism is often performed when a child is a baby although some are baptized as adults at the point in their life that they are ready to make that commitment. We're all baptized to be part of God's community. We become children of God. Like Jesus, God has a plan for us with a ministry of our own. There is a role for each of us to play in the family of God. We can listen for the guidance of God and decide how best we can be servant's of His will.

I read a story about a woman who was puzzled as to what her service to God could be. She asked her minister for guidance. The minister knew her talent for baking and suggested she bake pies for Jesus. The woman was now more confused. How could she bake pies for Jesus? Then one day a friend was having a difficult time and without thinking she baked a pie and delivered it to her. They sat and had a long conversation. When the woman left her friend thanked her warmly for the pie and the visit. It was at that point that the woman understood what the minister meant. Understanding now, she continued to bake pies for Jesus.

Tom Wallace pastor of Bible Baptist Church in Maryland tells of a baptism experience in his own church. It took place on a Sunday morning. The morning service was about to begin when in came a man that had never attended the church before. He looked around with awe and amazement at all the people filling the sanctuary. He walked slowly down the aisle looking around until he finally found a seat two rows from the front. As the minister spoke this fellow listened with the keenest of interest.

When the invitation was given, “How many of you are not saved but you would like to be and you would like us to pray for you? Will you raise your hand?” He raised his hand high and waved it about until he was sure that the pastor had seen it. When asked to come forward he bounced out of the seat and hurried to the altar. He was asked “Sir, do you believe that Christ died for sinners?” “Yes sir, I want to do just that” he said with a beam of triumph about him.

After being baptized into the newness of Christian life he clapped his hands and shouted “Hot dog, hot dog.” The people in the congregation roared with laughter. The pastor quickly asked for silence and explained that instead of familiar words like praise the Lord or Amen, this man was simply praising God with the only vocabulary he knew.

It was with His baptism that Jesus began his ministry. We ourselves are about to begin a new chapter of ministry on this charge. Through my time of almost 20 years worshipping here we’ve enjoyed long time ministry from Bruce and had some wonderful leadership from Gary over his seventeen months of temporary work as our new full time minister was chosen. Both churches continue to be warm and friendly places for worship, welcoming to newcomers and the place to be for many different events sharing in fellowship. While both churches face the ongoing challenge of numbers of people participating in church activities, I believe we’re on a firm foundation for some exciting growth in this charge. We’re entering into a new relationship with our full time minister Reverend Robin Sherman. This is an opportunity to reflect on our role in the family of God, an opportunity to move forward as a strong force in the Christian community in our area.

Jesus has called us. He has called us to follow him. We’re to follow him to share our gifts and talents with the needy of the community and of the world. He calls us to show God’s mercy and compassion to those who are suffering illness and in need of his loving touch. We’re called to bring the light of Christ into people’s lives where there is darkness.

You may be struggling with your own difficulties. How can we bring light to others when our lives can be cloaked in darkness and hardship? The answer is found in Jesus’ baptism. We read in the Bible that after he came out of the river the Holy Spirit descended upon him. The same Holy Spirit is there for us. When we respond to God’s call, his Holy Spirit will come upon us. We become another of God’s children. As members of a great family of believers in Friendship and Wesley churches and in the world we can carry out the ministry God has planned for us. God empowers each of us to understand how we can be part of the ministry of our church. Like the fellow I spoke of earlier, my hope is that accepting the Holy Spirit into our lives can be done with an enthusiastic exclamation of “hot dog, hot dog!”

Amen