

## Remember Who You Are

Once upon a time, there was a teenage girl whose parents and grandparents had raised her with loving care. They'd sheltered her—a bit protectively—because she was the only daughter in the family. At long last, the time had come when she was allowed to date. To go out with a boy in a car. She was way excited, because the most popular, best-looking guy at school had asked her out. Her! She'd spent hours selecting her outfit and doing her hair. He'd told her they were going to a party at a friend's house—and she'd heard through the grapevine that the friend's parents were out of town. She was so, so ready for some freedom and independence. Ready to spread her wings and fly!

Well. At the appointed hour, her date came to pick her up. But as they headed down the front walk toward his car, she thought she'd pass out from embarrassment when her grandmother called to her from the porch: *Remember who you are!*

Remember who you are! I think that when we hear this Sunday's account from Luke's Gospel, these same words are

being whispered to us across the Christian centuries. *Remember who you are.* You just might hear them in your heart, if you let your imagination travel back to the setting of Luke's narrative, to the place where Jesus is baptized.

When you envision the baptism of Jesus, maybe one of the first questions that comes to mind is *why? Why is Jesus baptized? Is baptism not the washing away of sin? And is Jesus not sinless?*

Yes! He is! Yet this One who is without sin *identifies* with sinners. Cares for sinners. Has compassion for sinners. And so he offers baptism. His own baptism—and yours. Jesus offers baptism. For he knows you. He knows who you are. He knows that you're a human creature descended from those who, in the garden, were disobedient. He knows our human condition. He knows our human nature is sin-damaged.

So the first step in remembering who we are is acknowledging that you—and I—are sinners. That is a part of who you are. But it's not *all* of who you are.

Because you are baptized! Baptized in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Baptized in the name of the God whose presence is made known at the Jordan. The God whose voice comes from heaven. The God who arises

from the river. The God who descends in a rush of white wings. Knowing the nature of this triune God in whose name you've been baptized helps you to remember who *you* are. You are one who has been baptized by water and by the Spirit of God. Just as Jesus was baptized, according to Luke.

But right before Luke tells us that Jesus was baptized, Luke lets us in on the fact that, at some point *after* the baptism, Herod the tetrarch locks the Baptizer up in prison. For speaking out against Herod's relationship with and marriage to his brother's wife. Luke wants us to understand that John represents a threat to the powers that be. And that Jesus will also represent a threat to the powers that be.

If Jesus is, what about you and me who follow him and strive to be like him? Are you a threat to the powers that be? Maybe you've never thought of yourself that way.

But you are baptized. And when you reflect on baptism, you can't help but realize that it is a radical act. A revolutionary act. When you make the vows of baptism, or when they are made for you, you pledge your loyalty to Christ. You put your whole trust in his grace. You throw off the hold that any other power has on you. You surrender yourself. You abandon yourself to the awesome

power of God in water and in the fire of God's Spirit. In the words of Eugene Peterson, Christ "will ignite the kingdom life, a fire, the Holy Spirit in you, changing you from the inside out."

Baptism changes your identity. Through baptism, your destiny is linked forever with Christ's. To have gone under the waters of baptism is to have been buried with Christ. To have died with him and died to sin. To be raised from the waters of baptism is to be raised with Christ. To have a share with the Son of God. And so to become a part of the *family of God*.

Remember who you are! You are one who has been claimed by God. As a son. As a daughter. At your baptism, God rejoiced and celebrated. A voice from heaven resonated in your deepest places; a still, small voice spoke words of tenderness: *My child, I see within you my own image. I'm so pleased with you! I take delight in you.*

This One who takes delight in you is the One who gathers you in. No matter how far you stray, no matter how far you wander away—even to the ends of the earth—God will gather you in. God will gather in each daughter, each son. Through the prophet Isaiah, God has promised! And God knows the name of each of God's children.

Remember who you are! You are one who has been called by name. You are one whose name God knows. When someone takes the time and the trouble to learn your name and to remember your name, chances are excellent that that someone wants to be in relationship with you.

There is One who desires to be in covenant relationship with you, who yearns to be in intimate communion with you. You are a person who prays. When you pray—as Jesus prayed after his baptism and throughout his life—you gladden the heart of God who loves you.

Remember who you are! You are one who is deeply loved by God. In God's eyes, you are precious. And because you are, God promises to be there when the winds howl and chaos whirls all around you. God promises to be there when there seems to be no escape from the firestorms of this life that surround and threaten to consume you. God never promises that trials and troubles won't come. But your God in Christ Jesus comes to be with you. To protect. To help. To comfort. To save. Because God's love for you is limitless and God's grace is measureless. Great grace has been poured out on you through God's act in baptism. Baptism is *a visible sign of invisible grace*.

Remember who you are! You are a recipient of grace. Like everyone else in this sanctuary—including your pastor—you have done nothing to *deserve* that grace. There's nothing you could have done to *earn* that grace. It's a gift. A free gift.

Free! But not cheap. For in a baptism-shaped life, God's grace must be—*has* to be—balanced by human response. In the vows of the baptismal covenant—which we as a congregation reaffirm on this Baptism of the Lord Sunday—you're asked to make solemn promises about the ways you'll continue to respond to the grace of your baptism.

You repent of sin. Repentance is reorientation. Repentance is heading in a new direction. Repentance is turning toward God. Repentance is a response to the grace of baptism.

You resist evil, injustice, and oppression in whatever forms they present themselves. That's how—in this world—you live as a part of the body of Christ. Resistance to evil, injustice, and oppression is a response to the grace of baptism.

You confess Jesus Christ as your Savior. You believe him and you believe *in* him. You place your faith in him. Faith is a response to the grace of baptism.

And you promise to serve him as your Lord. Every baptized Christian is a minister! And ministry means serving—a desire to serve born of love for God and love for the neighbor. Being about the loving service of God's present and coming kingdom is a response to the grace of baptism.

Through that grace, you are one who's being called and equipped to go out these doors and make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.

Remember who you are! And remember *whose* you are. You are one who belongs to God. God has fashioned you and marked you with the seal of the Holy Spirit. You are God's, today and always and forever.

Remember who you are! You are one who has been claimed as God's own. You are God's beloved child. You are one who has been baptized. Rejoice and be thankful!

In the name of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. Amen.