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**Weekend of Sunday, January 7, 2018**  
**The Baptism of Our Lord/Lectionary X/Proper X/Year B**  
**Primary Text: Mark 1:4-11**  
**Sermon Title: “Into What Are You Baptized?”**

**Theme**

*Mark’s gospel reports the story of Jesus’ baptism with some irony: the one on whom the Spirit descends is himself the one who will baptize others with the Holy Spirit.*

**Text**

<sup>4</sup>John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. <sup>5</sup>And people from the whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem were going out to him, and were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. <sup>6</sup>Now John was clothed with camel’s hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. <sup>7</sup>He proclaimed, “The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the thong of his sandals. <sup>8</sup>I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.”

<sup>9</sup>In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. <sup>10</sup>And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. <sup>11</sup>And a voice came from heaven, “You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.”

## Sermon

The gospel reading for today is a narrative, a story from the life of two great heroes of the New Testament; those two being John the Baptizer and Jesus the Christ. Mark didn't give us a lot of details but it begins with John and more specifically, Mark described who and what John's ministry was. He was an eccentric – he did not look or behave like his contemporaries. And, as I have said many times before, John was *all in* with regard to his ministry. Personally, I think it was how God created him and it was all part of God's purpose and plan from the beginning. So the next time you see someone who is a little unusual, rather than label them as “weird,” ask yourself, “I wonder what God has in store for that person?”

John came with a specific purpose and that was to prepare the way of the Lord. Again, personally, I think there is room to believe that John just did what he did almost robotically, so focused was he on his calling. With raw abandon he called people, then and now, to examine their lives, confess their shortcomings, and shed those things that are potential obstacles between themselves and God's Messiah – the one who is to come.

The important thing here is that John and his baptism had a specific purpose. His was a baptism of repentance and preparation.

In the second part of the gospel reading, Jesus entered the scene there on the banks of the Jordan and with little narrative from Mark, Jesus was baptized and then the Spirit descended on Jesus like a dove and a voice was heard saying, “You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.”

Then during the earthly ministry of Jesus it appears as though no baptisms took place. It was not until the Great Commission at the Ascension that Jesus made baptism the initiation rite for Christians – so given the primitive time that it was, the fact that Jesus left no book of theology, it took years to understand and ritualize what it meant to accept a life of discipleship under the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

But by the time of Luke, the author of the Second Reading written sometime in the early First Century, it is clear that that has taken place. And so it is to the Second Reading that I find the LORD leading us today.

The Second Reading is also a narrative, the narrative of Paul's interaction with some Christian disciples in Ephesus. Now once again, let me remind you that what it meant to be Christian and how that was all ritualized was a process, and so we should not be surprised that Paul encountered Christian disciples in Ephesus with a different understanding of what life of discipleship under the Lordship of Jesus Christ meant.

But in the dialogue Paul discovered that their baptism was not a Trinitarian Baptism, (i.e., in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit as Jesus commanded in the Great Commission) but John the Baptizer's baptism. Paul explained the difference and once explained, the Ephesians requested a Trinitarian baptism and then the Holy Spirit came upon them and they were given special gifts with which to do ministry.

I took the sermon title from Paul's question to the Ephesians. In verse 3 he asked, "Into what then were you baptized?" because I think this is a fundamental question, hence the title, "Into what are you baptized?"

Today, as you know is the festival Sunday of the Baptism of Our Lord, a day upon which we not only celebrate the baptism of Jesus, one moment in time, but also gives us the occasion to celebrate our own baptisms – *not* that one moment in time when water was poured over our heads, but what that moment initiated – and that of course is, a life of discipleship under the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

I am going to presume that each one of us has been baptized, and like the Ephesians, having been baptized we have been given gifts for ministry. Not gifts like Christmas gifts – things we may have wanted or not – but gifts that God wants us to have for the sake of the whole Christian body, the church. So you see, the question is an important one to all of us – "Into what are you baptized?"

And God continues to give us gifts throughout our lives. God puts us in positions and vocations and situations to build up our base of skills and abilities so that at some point when God sees fit we can use them in a situation he has planned for.

I don't know why God called me to the ministry at age 33 when many of my classmates in seminary were just 22 and fresh out of college and others were already retired from a previous career. I came to ministry with some life

experience; more than some, not as much as others. That doesn't make me a better pastor than any of them, but I do believe and trust that God needed me as I was, as I am, for such a moment as this, in this place. I have to believe that or all this is just a waste of our time.

“Into what are you baptized?” And how will you live out your baptism, your life of discipleship under the Lordship of Jesus Christ. It is not a once and done question and answer, but one we must ponder every moment, of every day, for the rest of our lives.

### **Raisin' the Bar Challenge**

My Raisin the Bar Challenge for you this week is this; contemplate this question which is the title of my sermon, “Into What Are You Baptized?” If you are baptized, then there is only one right answer; you are baptized into Christ and that includes all that I mentioned in the last several moments and more, after all a life of discipleship under the Lordship of Jesus Christ is a journey not a destination.

But what I am really getting at in this question, “Into what are you baptized” is that how we answer it every moment of every day informs how we act, react, and interact with others and the world around us.

Perhaps like no other time in my lifetime, I see a need for a new level of civility and graciousness. And if it does not begin with Christians then I have no hope for the world. The fact is, neither did God and that is why he sent us Jesus as the model of the godly life. As his disciples we need to model the godly life for the sake of the world. It is what we are baptized into.

Oh we all fail to hit the mark of the example of our Lord Jesus, but God's grace is sufficient to cover us when we fail. This issue today, as it has been given to me, is this, we have been called into a life of discipleship under the Lordship of Jesus Christ, and therefore we need to live a life worthy of our calling.

### **Prayer**

Amen