

Meditation

The Rev. Christine Chakoian

Luke 3:15-17, 21-22

First Presbyterian Church

Baptism of the Lord Sunday

Lake Forest, Illinois

Service of Renewal of Baptismal Vows

Jesus began his ministry this way: by being baptized, by being baptized by water and the Holy Spirit. He began his ministry by being claimed by God: you are my Beloved Son; or, as some translations read, “Today I have begotten you.” Jesus knew his baptism was so much more than a ritual, a rite of passage. His baptism was nothing less than his commissioning ... his choice to live into his identity ... his commitment to God’s claim on him for every aspect of his life.

Today, we begin our ministry again by renewing our baptism, our baptism of water and the Holy Spirit. We begin this year again by being claimed by God: you are my beloved child, God says to us; you are begotten as Christ’s own, with Christ’s own DNA, a gift of the Holy Spirit that courses through us now. Our baptism – and our renewal today – is so much more than a ritual, a rite of passage. Our baptismal renewal is nothing less than our commissioning ... our choice to live into our identity as members of Christ’s family... our commitment to God’s claim on us for every aspect of our life.

What does this mean for us? For each of us, it will have deeply personal implications. It is our opportunity to stand before God and ask, “Lord, what would you have *me* to do? How can I best be a steward of the gifts you have given me?” It is a sacred moment: to consider our mission in life, and how all of our daily moments contribute to God’s own agenda for our world. It is a thoughtful moment:

to ponder the ways we detract from God's mission ... by remaining self-focused, or bearing Christ's name carelessly, ineffectively, or perhaps even shamefully. It is a deciding moment: to claim again our high calling, as the ones who bear Christ's DNA, who bear the Lord's name, and represent his compassion, his justice, his forgiveness, his grace in every corner of the world we touch. And it is, finally, a joyful moment: to celebrate our common ministry as members of the family of faith here at First Church, to look around and marvel at the brothers and sisters in Christ we have been given, a fellowship of believers, all yearning for the same end of faithfulness, and fullness of life.

I don't know how you will live out your sacred calling in this year ahead. Perhaps you will take up a new ministry. Recently you received a marvelous letter from the Board of Deacons inviting you to consider spending a little of your time in one of the life-changing ministries our church does for those in special need. Perhaps you will re-examine your priorities: the time you spend at work or with your family; the ways you take care of your body or waste precious time on things that do not satisfy. Perhaps you will review your financial commitments: to give more generously to the work of God in this place, and to other places that impact the world for good. And perhaps you will commit yourself anew simply to know Christ better in this year ahead: to discover the ways his Spirit is already stirring in your spirit, and leading you closer to him.

Whatever else this celebration of renewal means to you, I pray that it means this: that you know, deep in your own heart, that you belong to God; that you are made part of Christ's family now. And I pray that you know that you are no longer alone: that you are surrounded by this cloud of witnesses, this household of faith.

And, finally, I pray that you will confidently feel Christ's own hand, his presence, his comfort. For as we gather at the font this day, we also gather at his table – to be fed by his hand, and renewed by his strength, and filled with his Spirit again.
Amen.