

Drink Deep Mark 1:4-11

George was a young seminary graduate serving his first congregation. He and his wife were visiting the Smiths one Saturday afternoon to talk about the next day's baptism of the Smith's daughter. Mrs. Smith sensed that something was wrong because the pastor's wife seemed a bit more quiet than usual. But not wanting to be nosey she pretended not to notice.

As the couple was leaving, everything became clear when Mrs. Smith overheard the pastor's wife say, "All right, we can go by the church and you can practice baptizing me just one more time. But remember this, when you have your first funeral, you're on your own!"

I don't think that practicing to baptize someone is something many new pastors do. It's not necessary. What I do consider necessary is practicing our baptism or living our baptism so it makes a difference. Which brings me to our passage for this morning.

Let's listen to the word of God.

This morning we celebrate the Baptism of our Lord. In ancient times, the Christmas season wouldn't be over until after this Sunday. The reason is that everything in Jesus' life as an infant, a child and a young adult leads up to this point and beyond.

Jesus' baptism was the mark of the beginning of His earthly ministry. Not His life but His ministry. And it was His ministry that was the most important part of His life.

His **baptism is that dividing point between the old and the new**. Just like it is for us.

Baptism is that dividing point for us as well. It's that starting over point. The point of our second chance.

We in the Presbyterian church generally celebrate baptism in worship, or at the very least in the presence of other people. But Cameron had other ideas. He walked into his pastor's office fresh from soccer practice and said, "I want to be baptized." They'd been learning about baptism in Sunday School.

Using her best pastoral care tone of voice, the pastor said, "Cameron, do you really want to be baptized, or do you just want to be baptized because your friends are going to be baptized?" His freckles winked up at her and he said, "No. I want to be baptized."

"Why," she asked. "Because it means I belong to God" Cameron answered.

She was touched by his understanding. "Well, then," she said, "How about this Sunday?" Cameron squirmed a bit and said, "Do I have to be in front of all those people in church? Can't I just have a friend baptize me in the river?"

She asked where he came up with that idea. Cameron said, "I read it in that book. Some guy named John baptized his cousin Jesus in a river, right?" Caught off guard, she conceded, "Yes that's right. But if a friend baptizes you in the river, how will other's know?"

By now she was thumbing through the Book of Order but before she got to section on baptism Cameron said, "I guess others will know by my new way of living."

Baptism calls us to a new way of living.

Baptism also tells us how much God loves us and the extent of that love.

You may have seen the movie *My Big, Fat, Greek Wedding* where Toula, a girl from a Greek family, falls in love with Ian Miller, who is not Greek. Her father Gus, a staunch

Greek, won't allow his daughter to marry Ian Miller unless he's baptized in the Greek Orthodox Church (where baptism is by immersion 3 times representing the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit).

Toula and her brother Nick are talking and Nick says, "It's not so bad, huh?" Toula, who has had some self-esteem issues, replies in horror, "Are you kidding? Any minute now he's going to look at me and go, 'Yeah, right. You're so not worth this.'" Nick says, "Yes you are."

Which is exactly what God says to us. Not only the day we're baptized, but every time we see and participate in a baptism. God looks at us and says: "You're so worth it." Remember that next week when we celebrate the baptism of both Grace and Luke Thune.

Last thing to know is that our **baptism makes a difference**. In Philadelphia years ago three 9-year-old boys were baptized and joined the church. Not long after, because they were unable to continue with its dwindling membership, the church sold the building and disbanded.

One of those boys was Tony Campolo, author and Christian sociologist at Eastern College. Dr. Campolo remembers it this way: "Years later when I was doing research in the archives of our denominations, I decided to look up the church report for the year of my baptism.

There was my name, and Dick White's. He's now a missionary. Bert Newman, too, a seminary professor of theology. All three of us doing something in ministry. Then I read the church report for that year: 'It has not been a good year for our church. We have lost 27 members. Three joined, and they were only children.'

Now, not everyone who is baptized grows up to be a Tony Campolo or a Seminary professor. And while we might not go to the mission field like Dick White, we all become missionaries through the water of our baptism because that is the water of life.

It changes everything. It cleans us up and gives us a starting over point. It reminds us just how much we are loved. And all we're asked to do is drink deep from the water of life.

There are a lot of things in the world that we hunger and thirst for. But we know from Jesus' teachings that it's only the living water which He offers that can quench the thirst of the soul. The water which He Himself experienced at His own baptism. "If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink."

The invitation is simple, come and drink. Remember YOUR baptism. Drink deep from the water of life.