

Ser21-2 "Being the Church – Where it all Begins" 1-10-21

Acts 19:1-7 and Mark 1:4-11 Baptism of Jesus



So, are we "going" to church today or are we "being" the church? there are those who can only imagine church as being in the sanctuary in person, doing all the stuff we've always done. For those folks I know this time is hard. There's this sense of beauty with the stained glass windows, the mural of Jesus There's no compromise for some...If they can't have that then they won't have any of it. I think those are the people who go to church...and may not

be those who seek to be the church. It's hard because we are a little in limbo, waiting; in transition as well in looking toward calling a new pastor.

Transitional times in our lives almost always raise our expectations or sometimes lower them. Something new and different is coming --- and we expect something good to happen. OR We're in transition from one thing to another---& we imagine not much will happen in the in between times. It will be boring. We'll just have to wait and see....and often times it's in the waiting and seeing that the self-fulfilling prophecy thing happens: we go passive and indeed not much does happen. Let's not wait and see...let's do something exciting & important.

My Friends, if I have learned anything in the past 30 years of ministry and especially in the past 10 years as an interim pastor, it is that the church is always in transition...that's why I chose the title for this sermon: Being the Church – Where it all Begins: with our Baptism. To lay claim to the roots of our faith and our life in Christ. Rather than transition, we prefer stability, and constancy. But the circumstances of our lives don't make for smooth sailing always.

The essential question this morning is: grounded with our baptism, what does it look like to be the church... to be the church with all of our transitions and comings and goings. To be the church without necessarily "going to church." ⁹ *In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan.* ¹⁰ *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.* ¹¹ *And a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved,^[d] with you I am well pleased."* Jesus was baptized, launching his public ministry in the world...set out to show the world what being the church would look like: good news to the poor; proclaim release to the captive; sight to the blind; and let the oppressed go free....that's being the church

The SC has finished a final draft of the Congregational Profile, a document that will present Trinity's call for a new settled pastor. In that draft the committee included your new ID, mission, and vision statements: Preamble – Identity Statement of Who We Are as Trinity UCC:

TUCC is more than a building, it is our home, our safe place of refuge, spiritual growth, reflection, and worship. Together we forge a Christian fellowship that is committed to the community by responding to the needs of our congregation, neighbors, and those in crisis. We welcome those from all walks of life and create disciples of Christ for the present and the times to come.

Mission Statement -- **TUCC exists to Love people where they are and encourage them to grow in their relationship with Jesus Christ.**

Vision Statement -- In Ten years, TUCC will be a church that is **a vibrant and diverse community of Christians that welcomes and seeks out people from all walks of life, and that supports the spiritual, physical, and emotional needs that challenge the community and its members.**

So, in these days at the beginning of 2021, I'm wondering how we're doing with these challenges of being the church.

The two texts remind us where this all begins as a person of faith...but most especially where this process begins for a Christian. And in some ways that begins with Baptism. As you heard in the intro to the gospel, Mark was

written first....before the other three gospels. Instead of the birth stories of Jesus, Mark begins with Baptism...with the baptism of Jesus. So, Jesus' public ministry in the world begins with his baptism. And then in Luke's writings in the lesson from the Acts of the Apostles, Paul inquires of Appollos about whether they had received the HS when they became believers.

When Paul arrives in Ephesus, where our story takes place, Apollos had left for Corinth. But Paul meets a group of Christians there who, like Apollos, had an inadequate understanding of baptism. They had never heard of the Holy Spirit, and they had been baptized "into John's baptism" (19:3). Paul has to explain to them that John's baptism was a "baptism of repentance" anticipating the coming of the Messiah. Subsequently, Paul baptizes them into "the name of the Lord Jesus" and lays hands upon them. John anticipates the coming of the Messiah, "who will baptize...with the Holy Spirit" (Mark 1:8).

Please note there is a difference between John's baptism, a "baptism of repentance," and that of Jesus, a baptism in which the Spirit is bestowed. It becomes clear that baptism "into Jesus" or "into the name of Jesus" is accompanied by the gift of the Spirit. Even though I could never imagine re-baptizing anyone already baptized in a Christian community of faith, Paul rebaptizes those who are already called "disciples" (19:1), but who have not yet received the Spirit, in order to bring them into the fullness of life in Christ. This is saying quite emphatically that the work of the HS is essential to the life of faith and the life of being the church. For you see, in Christian baptism, the event marks the inauguration of a new life and vocation for the one being baptized.

My friends "What does Baptism signify? The sacrament of baptism is an outward and visible sign of the grace of God. Through baptism a person is joined with the universal church, the body of Christ. In baptism, God works in us the power of forgiveness, the renewal of the spirit, and the knowledge of the call to be God's people always."

How many of you remember your baptism? Like with the children and youth this morning most mainline protestant Christians don't remember their baptisms because they were baptized as babies. I, however, remember my baptism very well. At the age of accountability, as it is expressed in most evangelical churches, I was baptized at age 9 in the First Baptist Church of Denmark, S.C. I was baptized in the baptismal waters held in huge pool or tank up in the chancel of the church.

I don't have much time to share more of this story but it is important that I say that later in my life when I seminary in the 1980's, as I came to terms with some of the hard struggles of growing up in a rigid and judgmental church life, I came perilously close to resent my baptism...it was when I could still claim that baptism as God's gift to me through the working of the HS that I was freed to not let go of my baptism but to embrace it and cherish it...as I do even to this day.

Let us resolve at the beginning of this new year to be the church that continues to >> May it be so for you and for me. Amen.