

Baptism: More Than Cleansing
Mark 1:4-11

We live in a world where social medias like Facebook and Twitter have become places where some people can connect with the world. But is it a world of true acceptance and fulfillment? In my research, I read that, "Sherry Turkle, an MIT professor, internet scholar, and author of Alone Together, has discovered that people today report feeling simultaneously *more connected* and *lonelier* than ever before." The reason is because the social media offers us affirmations through the "likes" on Facebook or the number of "followers" on Twitter. The more friends we have the more connected we are to others, but have these "Friends" and "followers" really accepted us into their families?

Affirmations and number of connections are not the same as being accepted into another's family. When you think about it, friendships, marriages, and other relationships are created through face to face encounters with an initial baptism of the first visit to the new family. If you are married, I invite you to remember what it was like to be baptized by your spouse's family. If your single, my invitation is to remember what it was like to be baptized by the first time you met your friends family? Were you accepted just as you are or did you feel that you had to change to fit in with this new family? What John the Baptist teaches us that baptism is

more than a simple cleansing of our sins and affirmed that I am part of God's family. Let's see what John can teach us about being baptized into the family of God.

Mark doesn't waste any time getting to the purpose of baptism with water and the Holy Spirit. His gospel begins by jumping into the good news about Jesus Christ, God's Son, and the fulfillment the prophecy of Isaiah. According to Mark, John identifies himself as the messenger that Isaiah states will come to prepare the way for the Lord. John's task is to guide the ones who are waiting for the Lord's Messiah, to prepare their hearts and lives. The way John prepares them is to baptize them with water symbolizing the washing away of all that has kept them separated from a true relationship with God. John must have been pretty convincing. Mark shares that "everyone in Judea came to be baptized by John as they confessed their sins." I struggle to envision everyone in Judea racing to the Jordan River to be baptized by John. But, then, all is possible with God.

What intrigued me most about this passage is what John was calling for the people to do as they came to the river. Baptism for John was more than a cleansing of their old ways and starting fresh with God. In the Common English Version, it says that John called for the people to be baptized to "**show** that they were changing their hearts and lives and

wanted God's forgiveness." What I like about this version is that it clarifies what a confessing heart does; it changes lives. Baptism is more than an affirmation that we are part of God's family. Baptism is God accepting us for who we are and us wanting to become better people for God. Baptism is our initial meeting with God and God's family. All all welcomed, accepted, and included in the family events. You may have noticed that when I baptize a child I like to take that child around the congregation and introduce him/her to the leaders of God's family who will give him/her opportunities to come to our family gatherings. In the church, these "family gatherings" are the Bible studies, prayer groups, and hands on ministries where we build relationships with God, each other, and the people of our community. But John tells us there is more.

John's initial baptism of water prepares our hearts for the next baptism. John proclaims, "One stronger than I am is coming after me.... I baptize you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit." At this point John is unaware that Jesus is in the crowd. According to Mark, his very next baptism was Jesus. As Jesus is coming out of the water God speaks, "You are my Son, whom I dearly love; with you I am well pleased." This baptism is a more than a surface level of washing away my sins. I believe Jesus baptism was to cleanse him of his humanity and cloth him with full divinity. From this moment on, the Holy Spirit within him protects

Jesus as he is tempted by Satan, returned to the world, and guides others baptized by the Holy Spirit to drastically change the way people communicates with God. This baptism has transformed Jesus' heart and life. I believe this is what baptism with the Holy Spirit does to and for us, as well. However, this means we are to be baptized with the Holy Spirit, as well as, with water.

Baptism with water is initiated by us to meet God for the first time. Baptism with the Holy Spirit is initiated by God, but I come to this baptism to **show** my commitment to follow Jesus. This commitment is me accepting God into my family. Baptism with the Holy Spirit is for those who have shown that they are ready to follow by going to the people who are sick, hurting, hungry, and imprisoned. They are also ready to stand out against those whose leadership have kept God's people captive to the laws and the status quo of God lives in the Temple. Jesus brings God to the people, wherever they are and accepts them no matter who they are. The Christian church of today is supposed to follow Jesus by ministers to the same people Jesus ministered to in the three years after his Baptism. So, how are we, God's church, doing at being followers of Christ in our community and our world? Have you been baptized with the Holy Spirit?

Last week, I shared with you how my home church was all about just coming to worship, giving their donation, and going home. For me, this

congregation had been baptized with water, but had never experienced baptism with the Holy Spirit. For them, baptism was a rite of passage that acknowledge this person as entering into God's family. At my own baptism, what I remember most is that I was baptized with water from the Jordan River just like Jesus. Unfortunately, my baptism did nothing to change where I fit in this church family. I was still a kid who came to church, stayed for Sunday school, and went home. It was disappointing. I thought more would change when I finally joined the church. I thought after baptism and confirmation it was time to **be** God's disciples and go out and **do** God's work.

As I look back on that experience now, I realize that my church had only been baptized with water and not the Holy Spirit. For me, baptism meant I was ready to learn how to do the things I learned about in Sunday School and church. It was time to go into my community, get to know the people, and remind them that they, too, belong in God's family. My church had become complacent with their understanding that all they had to do to show God their love was come to church, write their meager checks, and be reminded that God loved them. I need more. I needed to walk in Jesus shoes, help like Jesus helped, and love like Jesus loved. I had been baptized with the water AND the Holy Spirit. This understanding of baptism is why I continue to challenge you to be more hands on with

ministry, biblical study, etc., I want you to experience Jesus' baptism of the Holy Spirit. It is easy to recognize those who have been baptized with the Holy Spirit; watch how they talk and how they work in the world.

I believe the time has come for the people in and of God's church to be baptized with God's Holy Spirit. Therefore, my challenge to you is to remember your own baptism and how **you** have **shown** that your heart and life has changed because of God. I have seen many souls in this congregation that have changed to a deeper understanding of God. I have heard a few of your stories about how you have grown closer to God. Now, the time has come to not only speak those words, but show me and others how God has impacted your life. You see, for us, baptism either by water or spirit, is a onetime act that starts us walking on a journey, following Christ, even to the cross. Now, the question is, "Are you ready to walk where Jesus walked?" Following Jesus is not an easy route to take for anyone. Jesus, as we will see in Lent, took great risks to **SHOW**, not just tell, of God's might and power. How can I, and the community of Denison, know you have been baptized by the Holy Spirit? What's your plan to discover what it means to be baptized with the Holy Spirit? Amen.