

“Remember Who You Are”

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[Matthew 3:13-17](#)

The 1994 animated movie titled “The Lion King” begins with a baptism. You won’t find this form of baptism typically performed in the Presbyterian Church, but it *is* essentially a baptism. There is a grand processional of all of the animals and birds from around the savannah, as they travel for some distance until they gather at Pride Rock. At this ceremonial ground, the attention of the animals is fixed upward on Mufasa, the king of the Pride Lands. Rafiki, the monkey who serves the role of minister in this scene, anoints Simba, the son of Mufasa, and presents him to the gathered animals. It is a beautifully animated scene with an amazing soundtrack, as young Simba is baptized and held high for all to see. It’s quite an occasion. But it’s *nothing* compared to the baptism of Jesus! John is there, baptizing person after person in the river Jordan, and here comes Jesus to be baptized. John is not a fan of this idea, telling Jesus that *he* should be baptized by Jesus, not the other way around. Jesus convinces him, and so John baptizes Jesus just as he has baptized so many others. But that’s when things change. This baptism becomes like no other baptism John has performed. Just after Jesus is baptized, Matthew tells us “suddenly the heavens were opened to him and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, ‘This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased.’” “The Lion King” hasn’t got a thing on this amazing baptismal scene where all who are gathered cannot doubt the importance of what they have just witnessed.

My baptism wasn’t quite like that, I don’t believe. I was baptized as an infant, so I cannot say for sure, but I believe others would have told me if there had been a processional from all around, a big soundtrack, or a voice from heaven. I imagine your baptisms were likewise lacking those large dramatic touches. An article in *Presbyterians Today* says “The act of baptism is deceptively simple....”¹ And yet, the moment of baptism is deeply profound for each of us, nonetheless. Jesus’ baptism was his commissioning service. It was to prepare him for what lay ahead, and the same is true for us. It is a rite of initiation, a mark of belonging, and a preparation

¹ December 2015, “Hope in a child”

for service. *The Directory of Worship* says “The sacrament of baptism, the sign and seal of God’s grace and our response, is the foundational recognition of Christian commitment.”

The PC(USA) *Declaration of Faith* says the following about baptism:

“We believe that in Baptism the Spirit demonstrates and confirms God’s promise to include us and our children in his gracious covenant, cleansing us from sin, and giving us newness of life, as participants in Christ’s death and resurrection. Baptism sets us in the visible community of Christ’s people and joins us to all other believers by a powerful bond. In baptism we give ourselves up in faith and repentance to be the Lord’s. For both children and adults, baptism is a reminder that God loves us long before we can love him. For both, God’s grace and our response to it are not tied to the moment of Baptism, but continue and deepen throughout life.” (6.5)

For Presbyterians, baptism is a mark of the covenant. In the Old Testament, members of the covenant were marked by circumcision. The new covenant of grace through Jesus Christ is marked by baptism. As the *PC(USA) Book of Order* states, “As circumcision was the sign and symbol of inclusion in God’s grace and covenant with Israel, so Baptism is the sign and symbol of inclusion in God’s grace and covenant with the Church.” Further, “Baptism signifies the faithfulness of God, the washing away of sin, rebirth, putting on the fresh garment of Christ, being sealed by God’s Spirit, adoption into the covenant family of the Church, resurrection and illumination in Christ.” (W-2.3004) There are many dimensions to baptism for us.

Matthew tells us that John’s baptism was about repentance, but John told everyone that Jesus was coming and His baptism would be different – He would baptize with the Holy Spirit. When Jesus was baptized, He ushered in a new baptism. Instead of simply being about washing away sin, baptism brings about the power of the Holy Spirit. Jesus wasn’t baptized as one needing repentance, because He was without sin. Jesus was baptized to transform baptism into a mark of the covenant of grace. There is a familiar saying that sacraments are “an outward sign of an inward grace.” Baptism is a public affirmation of the saving grace of our Lord. It is a symbolic act and a meaningful one, but it is not itself the saving act. Paul tells us in Ephesians “for by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God.” We are not saved by an act of our own doing, or of the pastor’s doing in sprinkling water or immersing us. We are saved by the grace of God. Baptism is a mark of that grace. It is a mark of the Spirit of God descending on us as it did on Jesus.

Martin Luther said that baptism is something that's done in church one day but takes the rest of our lives to complete. Baptism isn't an ending, it is a beginning. It isn't something we do once we get our lives in order; it is a rite of initiation into the journey of faith. It is a sign that we are ready to begin to take on the responsibilities of being a part of the community of faith, not that we have arrived and have everything all figured out.

The Book of Order states "Baptism enacts and seals what the Word proclaims: God's redeeming grace offered to all people. Baptism is God's gift of grace and also God's summons to respond to that grace. Baptism calls to repentance, to faithfulness, and to discipleship. Baptism gives the church its identity and commissions the church for ministry to the world." (W-2.3006)

In our baptisms, we are set apart as participants in the ministry of Jesus Christ. God then works through us for His purposes in this world. No matter where we go or what we do in our lives we will always be a part of the covenant community. Baptism is a mark for life.

Later in the movie "The Lion King," Simba has run away because he has been deceived into believing that he was responsible for the death of his father. He has taken on a new life, far from the life he once lived as the son of the king and as the rightful heir to the throne. Rafiki, the one who had anointed him in the opening scene of the movie, finds Simba and attempts to convince him to return home. Rafiki leads Simba to a pool of water and tells him to look into it. At first, he sees only his own reflection, but Rafiki tells him to look harder. When he does, Simba begins to see his reflection change into the reflection of his father. Rafiki says, "You see, he lives in you."

Jesus lives in us. We can see his reflection in us, if we look hard enough. Others can see that reflection, as well. The more that we live as members of the body of Christ, the clearer that reflection becomes. My wife, Kristi, once told me about a student of hers who radiated the Holy Spirit. That is what Kristi said about this young woman – that she had no other words to explain it. This young woman was truly reflecting Christ. Christ lives in her, and Christ lives in each of us. For some of us, it is not quite as easy to see that reflection.

As Simba sees his father's reflection, he hears his father's voice say, "You have forgotten who you are, and so have forgotten me. Look inside yourself, Simba. You are more than what you have become... Remember who you are." No matter what you have become in this life, there is a way back to who you are supposed to be. Remember who you are. Remember that you were claimed by God as uniquely His own and set apart for service. Remember who you are, and the reflection of God in you will become stronger and stronger.

William Willimon, theologian and author, wrote a book about baptism with that same phrasing. The book is called "Remember Who You Are." In that book, Willimon says this:

Through baptism, a Christian first and finally learns who he or she is. It is the rite of identity. Baptism asserts rather than argues, it proclaims rather than explains, it commands rather than requests, it acts rather than signifies, and it involves rather than describes.

When you ask in desperation, "Who, in God's name, am I?" baptism will have you feel the water dripping from your head...and say, "You are, in God's name, royalty, God's own, claimed and ordained for God's serious and joyful business. So, therefore, you had better get with it."

Remember who you are – and get at doing God's business. Baptism binds us with God in a unique and special way. We are holy in God's sight. We belong to God. And we are set apart to do God's work. There may not have been grand processions or thundering soundtracks at our baptisms, but something extraordinary took place in those moments. We were claimed as uniquely God's own, God's beloved, with whom God is well pleased. So, remember who you are – and, even more importantly, remember whose you are. Amen