

### 1.10.21 Baptized and Called to be Light for the World

- He was a gentle and faithful Pennsylvania Dutchman who crafted wood his entire life
- When Pope John Paul the Second visited Philadelphia in 1979, he celebrated Holy Communion on an altar that the Dutchman had made with care
- And then some years later, after reading a book about Holy Baptism and baptismal fonts, and a deep discussion in the Music and Worship Committee, this woodworker who was a member of our congregational made a beautiful baptismal font for the church
  - Like our marble font near the entrance to the nave here at Jerusalem, the font that he made had eight sides
  - But it was larger than most fonts – it held almost 15 gallons of water
  - And the shape of the bowl in the font was different from any other font that we had seen, because it was shaped like a cross
- So this wonderfully-made font through its shape and size called attention to three central meanings of Holy Baptism – bath, burial, and birth
  - The fifteen gallons of water was more than enough to immerse a child or for an adult to take a sponge bath
  - The cross-shaped bowl proclaimed that in baptism we have been buried with Christ, because we have been joined to His death
  - And the eight sides, like our marble font, symbolized new birth or eternal life
- Bath, burial, birth – these stand at the heart of Holy Baptism
- Today as we celebrate the Festival of the Baptism of our Lord, Christ's own baptism, though different, points to and reminds us of our baptisms
  - Jesus didn't have sin to wash away, and he had not yet gone to the cross, but in his baptism the Holy Spirit descended on Jesus and called him into his public ministry
  - And we who have been baptized NOT into the legacy of John the Baptist, but rather we who have been baptized into Christ have the promise that sin has been washed, sin has been put to death, and we have already been given new life

- In this sin-forgiving and life-giving baptism that as Saint Paul says in his letter to the Romans joins us to the death and resurrection of Christ – in this sin-forgiving and life-giving baptism we have also been called into lives of ministry
- Remember the baptismal service? After the water is poured and the words of God’s promise are spoken... after laying on hands and praying... after the sign of the cross is made on the forehead... at the end, the assisting minister takes a small candle, lights it from the much larger Christ candle, hands it to a parent or godparent, and says: “Let your light shine before others that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.”
- Actually, those words are not just words of the baptismal liturgy, those words in the service quote scripture from the fifth chapter of the Gospel of Matthew
- As baptized people, we have been called to let our light, which is a small reflection of Christ’s larger light shine!
- Let other people see our good works, not to glorify ourselves, but to give glory to God!
- We are called to be small candles to show Christ’s greater light in the world!
- And that is so important, because sometimes the world is so dark
  - Almost every week I have intentionally connected the Good News of Jesus Christ to the Coronavirus, because let’s face it – the pandemic is like the elephant in the room that takes up so much space in our daily life. And the virus is dark... and we need the light of Christ’s hope-filled Good News in this time of pandemic
  - But this week there was another event filled with darkness.
    - Obviously a few people rejoiced that an angry mob overran our US Capital, but I hope that you didn’t rejoice
    - And as I have talked to all kinds of people, both Republicans and Democrats, the unprecedented mob in United States history has evoked shock, and sadness, and anger

- Now please hear – God is not a Republican or a Democrat. In fact God is not even an American. God is God!
- But God through our baptisms into Christ has called us as part of the people of God to let our light shine wherever there is darkness – darkness like threats and violence, hate speech and hateful actions, and racism and privilege
- About a year ago in one of the movies about Mr. Fred Rogers’s life after his death, Mr. Rogers, himself a Presbyterian pastor who for years until his death had hosted his children’s show, taught me two Hebrew words that faithful Jews, and now faithful Christians can use to describe our calling to be little candles of light wherever there is darkness
  - Those two words, which I have shared with you before, but which bear repeating, are tikkun olam
  - And those two Hebrew words mean “repair the world” – although to be honest, if you do an internet search of these words you will find that they have also become the brand name of medical cannabis
  - But trust me, or at least trust Mr. Rogers, that with tikkun olam we are not referring to a recently coined brand name, but rather for centuries these ancient Hebrew words have described our calling to do God’s work of repairing this dark and wounded world
- This week our capital building and our American democracy was wounded. But this is just a fresh and obvious wound in the midst of a world where darkness and wounds are always present
  - But we dare not forget today, or ANY day, that our sin-forgiving and life-giving hope is rooted in Jesus Christ who was baptized in order to launch his public ministry.
  - And in turn, Jesus Christ has called and baptized us into his bath, burial and new birth, and poured the Holy Spirit into us, so that we can be candles of light that God uses to drive away the world’s darkness, and in Christ’s name, we are called to begin to repair the world