

Come To the Water

Matthew 3:13-17

I read about a preacher whose whole confirmation class decided they wanted to be baptized by immersion. It was one of those grand events with almost the whole congregation there at the local river. Parents were in tears, grandparents stood by proud and crying too as these young people made that momentous decision in their lives. Other youth and children stood in awe and wonder, filled with curiosity because most of them had never witnessed a baptism by immersion.

All that wonderful emotion was short circuited when during the very first baptism the preacher was heard to say: "I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son and ... holy moly, I forgot to take off my watch!"

Today we celebrate and remember the baptism of Jesus. I'm pretty sure John the Baptist didn't have the kind of trouble that preacher did. When Jesus came to the Jordan River to be baptized John was ready. He was a little reluctant at first. But he recognized Jesus, immediately. And he most certainly recognized the significance of that moment.

As we stand on the banks of the Jordan River watching Jesus, the sinless Son of God being baptized, we have to ask ourselves the same question theologians and Christians have been asking for centuries. "Why?"

If Jesus was the sinless Son of God, as we claim, then why did He have to submit to John's baptism? If you remember, John was preaching a baptism of repentance. As the people came to the water, they were consciously surrendering the guilt of their sin, being cleansed by the water of baptism and rising clean, whole and set free to serve God in a new way.

But Jesus didn't need that kind of baptism. He was and would remain sinless. John even tells Him, "I need to be baptized by you."

Jesus gently reminds John that it's all part of the greater plan and purpose and it will fulfill all righteousness. Some early commentators suggest that the only reason Jesus submitted to Baptism was because His mother wanted Him to. And that's not a very good reason for being Baptized. And I don't believe that.

Jesus was Baptized by John first and foremost to align Himself with us completely. How could he ask us to do something he had never done? But beyond the forgiveness of sins, Jesus' baptism did the same thing for Him that it does for us.

Baptism tells "Whose we are." And it reveals "Who we truly are."

In the 1995 Walt Disney/Pixar movie Toy Story, Woody is a cowboy action figure. The favorite toy of a little boy named Andy. But Andy's birthday rolls around and suddenly there is a rival for Andy's affection and attention named Buzz Lightyear. Buzz Lightyear is the newer toy and of course gets played with more. And of course, Woody gets jealous.

But what sets them both apart is something they only sort of realize

Woody has awakened after his first night of not sleeping in bed with Andy. He's grumpy and jealous. And he overhears Buzz Lightyear telling two of the other toys, Rex and Slinky: "Say there, lizard and stretchy dog, let me show you something. Looks as though I've been accepted into your culture. Your chief, Andy inscribed his name on me."

Buzz holds up his foot and sure enough, there is the name Andy written on Buzz's shoe. Rex and Slinky both marvel and Rex says, "Wow, with permanent ink, too."

Woody sees all this and is about to bust a gut, he's so jealous and angry. Woody looks at his shoe and sure enough, Andy's name is there, too. But it doesn't help. Bo Peep tries to comfort him but he's still angry because it seems Buzz is taking his place.

One of the things that struck me about that scene is that both of Andy's special toys, Woody and Buzz, have Andy's name on them. They have been marked with a symbol of his ownership.

Jesus knew who He was before he went for baptism by John, but John wasn't sure, and neither was the crowd. As soon as Jesus had been baptized "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."

If there were ever any inkling of doubt in Jesus' mind, it was cleared up at that moment. God claimed Him and the water of His baptism was God's mark. That's what Baptism does for us. It marks us with God's signature. It's as if God signed His name on us with permanent ink.

In the movie Toy Story 2, Woody is kidnapped, and he's taken to the apartment of a "bad" toy store owner. Woody finds himself in a dark room, all alone. He's trying to escape when he hears noises behind him and sees packing popcorn coming out of a box. The next thing he knows is he's flung on the back of a toy horse who runs around the room excitedly. He falls off the horse and the next thing you know he's bowled over by an over excited cowgirl, Jessie, who keeps hollering, "It's you. It's you. I can't believe it's really you. The Prospector said you'd come"

Jessie then says, "Holy mother of Abraham Lincoln, the Prospector will want to meet you."

Jessie and the horse, whose name happens to be Bullseye, bring out the Prospector, in mint condition, still in his original box. Woody is confused by all of this but can't understand how they know his name and asks "Hey, how do you know my name?"

Jessie says, "Everyone knows your name, Woody." Woody's even more confused than ever.

And the Prospector says, "Why, you don't know who you are, do you?" He then has Bullseye turn on the lights of a display filled with Woody memorabilia. It seems Woody was the star of a TV show, "Woody's Round Up." And Woody is totally flabbergasted and overwhelmed.

That's the way it is with baptism, too. God knows us before we know who God is, and in this sacrament, we are told who we truly are, a child of God, an heir of the Kingdom, brothers, and sisters in and with Christ.

But you see, sometimes we get so involved in the day-to-day pursuit of life, we get so immersed in the world that we forget who we truly are.

It's not that we mean to. It's not even that we want to. Oh, there are times when we choose to turn away. But then there are other times when we just sort of slowly drift away. Or slowly lose our focus.

And that's when the waters of our baptism come into to play. You see, like Woody, we've been marked by the hand of our Creator. The water has dried up, but it's God's mark on our lives, God's permanent mark. And in times when we've lost our focus, in times when we've drifted away, that mark, that water, reminds us of who we truly are.

Having said that, I want to invite you to "Come To The Water" this morning both metaphorically speaking and physically.

"Come To The Water" this morning, remember whose hand marked you as God's own.

"Come To The Water" this morning, remember who you truly are.

"Come To The Water" this morning, and like Woody, stand in awe of all that God has done for you and has planned for you.

"Come To The Water" this morning as we sing "I Was There to hear your Borning Cry"

Come, touch the water make the sign of the cross on your forehead to remind you, you belong to God.