

Sermon Title: **Remember Your Baptism**

Bible: Isaiah 41:1-9 & Matthew 3:13-17

Where & When: Baptism of the Lord Sunday at Gilroy UMC on Jan. 12, 2020

Audience: about 35 English-speaking Church Members

### **Opening Prayer**

Gracious God, by water and the Spirit, you gave us baptism. Through baptism, you show us your steadfast love. We want to remember your unfailing love and our baptism. Please be with my lips in your love and grace. In Jesus' name. Amen.

### **1. Do You Remember Your Baptism?**

Do you remember your baptism? I cannot remember my baptism, because it was an infant baptism. I was born into a Christian family, and I received baptism as an infant. When I became a teenager, I had a confirmation. At that time, I was grumpy. I really wanted to be baptized again with my own decision to be a Christian. And I had a dream of how to be baptized. However, because I had already been baptized as an infant, I was not able to be baptized again. The United Methodist Church does not re-baptize. Because Baptism is an act of God, there is God's steadfast love in the baptism. Now I understand the meaning of my baptism, and I am thankful for my parents raising me as a Christian.

Do you remember your baptism? How was it? The United Methodist Church recognizes the baptism of other Christian denominations. The United Methodist Church accepts many forms of baptism: immersion, pouring, and sprinkling. Is there anyone here who had an immersion

baptism? (Where was it?) This video shows the immersion baptism, and how they went into a real river: <https://youtu.be/t4pUIHnhTX0?t=7>. Is there anyone here who had an infant baptism? This video shows one example of infant baptism: <https://youtu.be/qKkNEjcDM5c?t=205>. Any forms of baptism are fine. What matters is God's grace. It does not depend on how it is done, the age, the emotion of the baptized person, or the pastor. It is God's grace that makes the baptism whole. All this is God's gift, offered to us without price.

## **2. The United Methodist Church's Baptism**

Baptism can have many meanings. It can be a sign of God's forgiveness of sins, the beginning of a new life, or becoming a member of Christ's holy church. For my parents, my infant baptism was their promise to nurture me in God's grace and love. I would like to share one interesting part of the United Methodist Church's baptism. At the beginning of the baptism, there is a part about "Renunciation of sin and profession of faith." This might come from the tradition of the immersion baptism, as the immersion has the meaning of dying and rising with Christ. I have heard of the forgiveness of sins. I am not that familiar with "Renunciation of sin." There are two questions. The first question is "Do you renounce the spiritual forces of wickedness, reject the evil powers of this world, and repent of your sin?" Do you understand this question? And what is your answer? The second question is "Do you accept the freedom and power God gives you to resist evil, injustice, and oppression in whatever forms they present themselves?" As most of us got baptized, our answers were and should be "I do." But how do we understand these two questions? What do they mean to us, now and here?

### **3. Safe Harbor Declaration and 2020 General Conference**

I would like to share one example with you. This is from the Western Jurisdiction United Methodist bishops. The five active bishops, including our Bishop Minerva Carcaño, announced this declaration in November 2019. That's because of the new restrictions voted on at the 2019 Special General Conference. As of January 1st, 2020, the new restrictions take effect. It makes it easier to file complaints against LGBTQ+ persons who enter into ministry. And if pastors preside over same-sex weddings, the church law requires mandatory punishments against those pastors. For the first offense, the pastors lose their salary for one year, and for the second, they can no longer be employed as pastors. These are the minimum penalties. What do you think of these new restrictions, and these minimum and mandatory punishments?

The five active bishops in our Western Jurisdiction are offering a safe harbor to refuse the new restrictions and those mandatory punishments. This means that they intend to set aside complaints against clergy accused of being gay or performing same-sex weddings. The two questions from the baptismal covenant are one of the many reasons why they declare the safe harbor. What do you think of this declaration? Which church do we want to have, the place of love and grace, or the place of complaints and punishment?

You might hear of the news about the future of the United Methodist Church. The United Methodist Church is a global denomination, which has about 13 million members from Africa, Europe, the Philippines, and the United States. There will be a 2020 General Conference in Minneapolis on May 5-15. After many years of struggling over the issues of human sexuality,

many separation proposals are being suggested to the General Conference. Each separation proposal will be discussed and voted on. I do not know which proposal will be passed. Because it looks impossible to reach a compromise, there is a big possibility of separation. Separation is not happy. It can be a heartbreaking process. But it looks like there is no other choice. Probably, it could be a blessing to be separated, rather than continuing to harm each other on and on. I am praying that this General Conference will be done in the spirit of grace, reconciliation, and healing. Please pray for the 2020 General Conference and our church. If you want to know more information about the Safe Harbor Declaration or the main proposals to the General Conference, please come to me, after worship.

#### **4. Remember Your Baptism**

How do you remember your baptism? To me, baptism means joining the body of Christ. We are all different. But we are all created in God's image, and we are all children of God. We are all the body of Christ. I would like to close this message while remembering our baptism.

(Water pouring into the font.)

(Thanksgiving over the water: Pour out your Holy Spirit, and by this gift of water call to our remembrance, the grace declared to us in our baptism. For you have washed away our sins, and you clothe us with righteousness throughout our lives, that dying and rising with Christ, we may share in his final victory. All praise to you, Eternal Father, through your Son Jesus Christ, who with you and the Holy Spirit lives and reigns for ever. Amen.)

(Reaffirmation of faith: Remember your baptism and be thankful.)

(The Holy Spirit work within you, that having been born through water and the Spirit, you may live as faithful disciples of Jesus Christ. Amen.)

### **Closing Prayer**

We give thanks for all that God has given us. As members of the body of Christ, and in this congregation of the United Methodist Church, we will faithfully pray and participate in the ministries of the church. Oh, Lord, please lead us and guide us. Remember us and our church. In Jesus' name. Amen.

### **Questions.**

1. Do you remember your baptism?
2. Do you have any stories about baptism?
3. What is your prayer for the 2020 General Conference and the United Methodist Church?