

Today, I will...

Epiphany 1A

The Baptism of our Lord

Isaiah 42:1-9

Matthew 3:13-17

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Growing up, whenever we visited my grandmother in Sulphur, Oklahoma, we were obligated to attend services at First Baptist Church on Sunday morning. In the church, front and center, was a painted pastoral scene of the bluest river I had ever seen, edged with grass-covered banks. You could see the water disappearing into the wings of the church. One of the things I remember most about those Sunday morning services was wondering why they had a river flowing through the church. Imagining where the river went was way more interesting than listening to the fiery sermons. I have no doubt that my parents had to suppress laughter as I rambled on about the river in the church. They finally told me that what I was seeing was nothing more than a giant bathtub, painted a deep blue and filled with water in which the preacher would baptize people.

It would be many more years before I came to realize that the painting was supposed to represent the Jordan River where Jesus was baptized. For those who witnessed Jesus' baptism it was an epiphany moment. No longer was he seen as just the son of a carpenter; he was also recognized as God's son.¹ Jesus rises from the Jordan River to begin his mission in the world.

Our baptisms are just as life changing. The reading from Isaiah speaks directly to the covenant made at baptism- God says, "...I have called you in righteousness, I have taken you by the hand and kept you; I have given you as a ... light to the nations, to open the eyes that are blind, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon, from the prison those who sit in darkness."² These words spoken to Isaiah's community are used to talk about the Messiah. But they are meant for us as well, as we strive to grow into the likeness of Christ with the help of the Holy Spirit.

I think we often treat baptism as a box to be checked in our spiritual lives before moving to the next task. Baptism is a blessing. It is also a responsibility. In our collect this morning, we prayed that we will keep the covenant we made at our baptism.³ Our baptismal covenant⁴ creates a binding relationship with God, where we agree to do our part to maintain the relationship and to bring the Kingdom of God near regardless of circumstances. Imagine what our world might look

like, how our lives would be different, if we saw our baptismal covenant as a daily call to continue Christ's mission in the world. If every morning we started the day saying, "Today, I will...."

Today, I will...continue in the apostles' teaching and fellowship.⁴ The teachings of the apostles and the way God continues to speak to us through Holy Scripture help us see the world through the lens of love. Taking time to weave together scripture, tradition, and reason provides balance for understanding our faith and opening our eyes to God's call to us. Fellowship with one another reminds us that we are part of something greater than ourselves.

Today, I will... continue in the breaking of bread and the prayers.⁴ Breaking bread together at Christ's table allows us to support one another in our life in Christ. Using the daily office as a structure for our prayers grounds us in love as we are faced with decisions and choices throughout the day. It is a time of joy spent in communication and relationship with God. Attending church, saying daily prayers builds our relationship with God and with each other.

Today, I will... persevere in resisting evil, and whenever I fail, I will repent and return to the Lord.⁴ Life is a constant challenge to walk the way of love. Temptations abound. All of us will, at one time or another, fail to resist the siren songs of the world that cause us to fall into sin. None of us are immune. We are called to strive to do our best, living a life of unconditional love. We are also called to acknowledge when we mess up, make things right to the best of our ability, apologize, and seek forgiveness.

Today, I will... proclaim by word and example the Good News of God in Christ.⁴ Unconditional love must be the driving force behind all that we do and say. Simple acts of random kindness speak volumes about who Christ is. Standing up for others and walking with them on their own journey is part of sharing the love we have received through Christ. Our choices matter and should always be considered through the lens of agape love.

Today, I will... seek and serve Christ in everyone, loving my neighbor as myself.⁴ Part of loving others is also loving yourself, but we aren't talking about narcissistic love. Loving yourself so that you can love others is about being comfortable in your own skin and believing that you are worthy of love. Taking time to see Jesus in every person, including yourself, changes the way we interact with the people in our lives and those we meet as we go through our day. Acts of unconditional love bring us together.

Today, I will... strive for justice and peace among all people.⁴ How much better would our world be if everyone started their day with this conviction? There are so many problems in our world that the mere thought of striving for justice can seem overwhelming. Perhaps, we even think that we can't make a difference, that our contribution is too small. It is important to remember that when we stand up for justice in whatever way we can, it makes an impact in some way for someone. Justice and peace go hand in hand. Where there is justice born out of

unconditional love for our neighbor, there is peace. And there can't be true peace without justice for all.

Today, I will... respect the dignity of every human being.⁴ If we are to live this part of our baptismal promise, then we must see everyone as a beloved child of God. While this may seem easier to do than performing acts of justice, it goes beyond mere acceptance and acts of charity. It is about being intentional in our interactions, so that the person across from us feels seen, heard, and loved. Welcome each person for who they are, rather than trying to stuff them into a mold of who we think they should be. We must believe that everyone is worthy of the love of God, of honor and respect, and then ensure that our actions speak louder than words.

Daily living of our baptismal covenant CAN AND WILL change the world. It creates little epiphanies as those around us see that Jesus is the God of love. As corruption, injustice, and the tragedy of death abound in our world, the thing that will get us through is staying true to our covenant promises to God. At times, I know this doesn't seem like enough. Yet when the words we profess in church turn into action out in the world, remarkable things happen.

We just don't always get to see how our labors bear fruit. Knowing that Jesus walks beside us and that the fire of the Holy Spirit fills us, helps to empower us to rise from the depths of despair and believe that change is possible.

Today, we will renew our baptismal vows. Let the words fill your soul. Make them part of your daily life. Let the unconditional love of God and the peace of Christ fill you. Allow the Holy Spirit to embolden you to step out into the world to spread the Good News of Christ. Know that you aren't alone as you strive to fulfill your covenant promises. May this knowledge give you hope. Together, with God's help, we can build an inclusive world where there is enough for all – a world filled with the joy, peace, and love of God.

Amen

Footnotes:

1. Matthew 3:17
2. Isaiah 42:6-7
3. *Book of Common Prayer*, 1979, p 214, collect for the first Sunday after the Epiphany: The Baptism of our Lord.
4. *Book of Common Prayer*, 1979, pp 304-305, Holy Baptism, The Baptismal Covenant