

## “With You I am Well Pleased”

First Presbyterian Church  
Pastor Dave Carlson  
January 8, 2018

**Old Testament lesson: Isaiah 42:5-9**

**New Testament lesson: Mark 1:4-11**

How many of you have seen the movie *It's a Wonderful Life*? Did anyone see it in the last week or two? I did. For many families, it's an annual tradition. My wife, Yuri, my mom and I watched it New Year's Day. Coincidentally, that was also the day I began thinking about today's sermon on the baptism of Jesus.

And, boy, I noticed something really magical. Do you remember the scene near the end where George Bailey is back on the bridge after wishing he had never been born? He's at his wits end, frantic with nowhere to turn. None of his friends and family know him anymore, since he was never born. He has no connection to anyone; no where to turn.

With his head dropping on the cold steel of the bridge, he says, “Clarence! Clarence!” – calling out to his guardian angel. “Help me, Clarence. Get me back. Get me back. I want to live again! Then there's a close up of George leaning on the bridge railing, praying. “I want to live again. I want to live again. Please, God, let me live again.”

And this is where I noticed something truly magical – if that's even the word for it. Suddenly, the wind dies down and a soft, gentle snow begins to fall. And you just know something has changed, something miraculous has happened. George is sobbing at the railing and a police car pulls up on the road behind him, and his friend Bert the cop gets out. “Hey, George! George! You all right?”

Yes, George is alright. He's back. His friends know him again. The turbulent winds in his life have subsided and a gentle snow is kissing his face as it falls from the heavens.

As I watched this scene, the vision of Jesus' baptism came to mind – the baptism that we heard described a moment ago and what it means to us.

The calm wind and gentle snow in the movie were used by the director as an outward sign that God answered his prayer when George said, "Please, God, let me live again," redeem my life and give it meaning again – family, friends, making a difference in his community, and a world of people who love and care for him. that loved and cared for him. That is what baptism is.

When we were baptized – or when we gather for the baptism of someone else – it's an outward sign that God has redeemed the life of God's people and given it meaning again – family, friends, service to the community, and a community that loves and cares for others.

In this way, the tradition of watching *It's a Wonderful Life* is like the tradition of baptism. Of course, the movie comes from the inspiration, vision and work of its creators, -the director and producer- and baptism? Baptism comes from the love, grace and mercy of our Creator -the God of heaven & earth. To better understand our baptism, lets look at its origins, in the baptism of Jesus.

Many people wonder why Jesus needed to be baptized. Was he not yet the perfect, divine son of God? Of course he was. As it says in the hymn *Silent Night*, "Jesus, Lord, at thy birth."

Jesus did not need to be baptized for his sake. He was baptized for our sake and for our salvation. In Jesus' baptism, we receive a tradition that has been handed down and practiced for 2,000 years. Jesus' baptism is the model for us to follow in our own baptism.

In baptizing Jesus, John recognizes that he is not worthy to stoop down and untie the sandals on Jesus' feet, and yet Jesus is baptized by John. Jesus humbles himself in baptism, and so do we.

When a couple like Matt and Celine brings their child to be baptized, they are acknowledging that they can't do it alone. They need God and they need a community of faith to ensure the welfare of their child and all the children of the world.

The same is true with any adult or young person who comes for baptism. It's a recognition that we can't go it alone in this world – we need God and we need one another- that's No.1.

The second thing we see in Jesus' baptism is that we are redeemed and made perfect in the eyes of God. The same Spirit that descended like a dove upon Jesus has come upon us.

In our baptism, we are embraced by the Spirit of God and in that embrace we are accepted by God just the way we are, as God's beloved children sent out into a world of need.

That's No. 3: We go forth into a world of need in the footsteps of Jesus. Following his baptism, Jesus began his public ministry, showing that with God, he can withstand temptation, (in the wilderness with the devil) work miracles, and give of himself sacrificially for the sake of others.

Our baptism calls us into community with one another in service to the world around us. This is the tradition of baptism: first, acknowledging that we can't do it alone – we need God and we need a community of faith; Second, accepting and embracing God's love and redemption despite all of our shortcomings; and third, going forth in the Spirit of God to give of ourselves for the sake of others.

Many people struggle to fully appreciate and live into the power and freedom of their baptism. Some are gripped by temptation – distractions – that get in the way of them acting on their faith; some don't believe that God can and will work miracles in their lives, if they only try – step out in faith; some feel they don't have anything to offer the world around them – nothing to give or do that would make a difference.

In all of this, we are putting ourselves before God and letting our baptism dry up. God always comes first to free us from temptation, bless us in miraculous ways, and equip us to be a blessing to others. In our baptism, the voice of God comes from heaven saying, "You are my beloved; with you I am well pleased." You are enough to make a difference in this world when you put your trust in God and step out in faith wherever God is calling you, right now.

Your presence here today is a testament to your faith in God and your desire to be a part of this community of faith, and in that, God is well pleased. Never forget that; never doubt yourself; never give up on God.

Instead, make a commitment right now, a New Year's resolution, a new family tradition to live into your baptism through the worship and work of this community of faith; to be open to the opportunities – invitations – to move beyond what you see as possible; and to embrace the joy and blessing of what God can do in – and through – you and your life. Amen.

## PASTORAL PRAYER

We thank you almighty God, for the gift of water, which cleanses us in our baptism for life lived in the power and love of your Spirit.

It was over the waters that the Holy Spirit moved in the beginning of creation.

It was through the waters of the Red Sea that the children of Israel were led out of their bondage in Egypt into the land of promise.

John the baptizer used water from the Jordan to baptize your Son Jesus, when he was anointed by the Holy Spirit as the Messiah, the Christ, to lead us, by his death and resurrection, from the bondage of sin into everlasting life.

Thank you, O Lord, for the gift of baptism. Through it, strengthen and heal all who look to you as Lord and Savior. And a special prayer of healer and renewal for our friend, Lynda Bergman following her knee replacement.

We pray all this in the powerful name of Jesus Christ, who taught to us the Lord's Prayer, that we might raise it in song together, singing:

**Our Father, who art in heaven,  
hallowed be thy name.  
Thy kingdom come,  
thy will be done,  
on earth as it is in heaven.  
Give us this day our daily bread;  
and forgive us our debts,  
as we forgive our debtors;  
and lead us not into temptation,  
but deliver us from evil.  
For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.**