



January 9, 2022
Sermon Series: *Seeing Jesus in a New Light*

With You I am Well Pleased

Pastor Jason Bryan-Wegner's Final Sermon at Zumbro

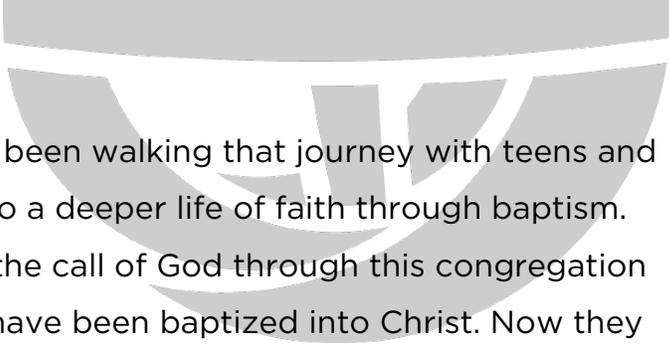
Luke 3:15-17, 21-22 NRSV

¹⁵As the people were filled with expectation, and all were questioning in their hearts concerning John, whether he might be the Messiah, John answered all of them by saying, 'I baptize you with water; but one who is more powerful than I is coming; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandals. ¹⁶He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. ¹⁷His winnowing-fork is in his hand, to clear his threshing-floor and to gather the wheat into his granary; but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.'

²¹Now when all the people were baptized, and when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, the heaven was opened, and the Holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form like a dove. ²²And a voice came from heaven, 'You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.'

Dear friends in Christ, grace, mercy and peace to you from God, who claims us as children in baptism, and from Jesus Christ, God's Beloved, who comes with Spirit and fire to transform our lives and the world. Amen.

Over my years of ministry here at Zumbro, one of the greatest joys has been accompanying families through the journey to baptism. I have loved talking with young parents who may be coming back to faith and the church after some years away and hearing the Spirit stirring in them to provide a faith foundation for their new baby, even if they have no idea what that really looks like. I've been inspired by others for whom faith has long been a defining characteristic of who they are and are excited to share the joy, love, and call to follow Jesus with their children. The only way to describe this is that their journey is Spirit-led.

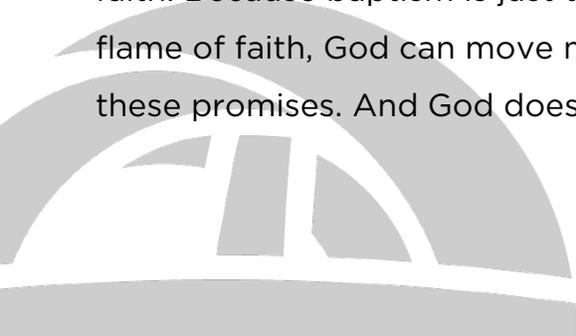


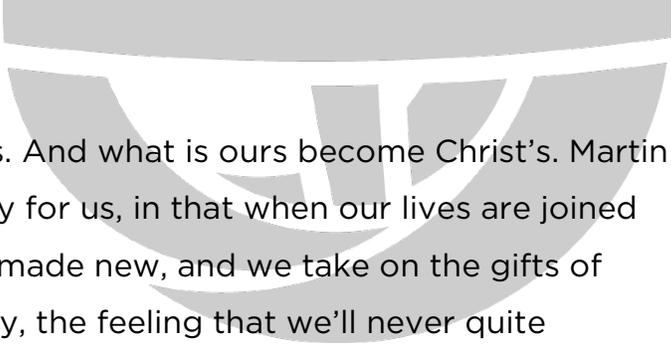
Some of the most memorable experiences have been walking that journey with teens and adults who have sensed the Spirit calling them to a deeper life of faith through baptism. Just in the last year, four teenagers have heard the call of God through this congregation and caring and faithful adults in their lives, and have been baptized into Christ. Now they are living out their questions and seeking God's guidance on how to build a more just and faithful world, and inviting their peers to do the same. The only way to describe this is that their journey is Spirit-led.

Several years ago, during pre-marital preparations with one of the first couples I married here, Danielle, the bride, shared with me that she hadn't been baptized. She grew up Jewish, but didn't have a lot of religious connection because there wasn't a rabbi available in the area she grew up. Her fiancé grew up at Zumbro, and she wanted to share the same faith as him. On their wedding day, as she came down the aisle looking radiant as brides do, she came to the font - the one cast in concrete in the center of the old sanctuary - and right there at the start of the wedding she was baptized in the name of the Triune God. Since then, they have brought their boys to these same waters of faith and life, and I have witnessed her share the hope of Jesus as her boys have grown. The only way to describe this is that her journey is Spirit-led.

The images offered in Luke's telling of Jesus' baptism don't easily line up with how we witness baptisms in worship - even the most inspiring ones. John the Baptist talks of Jesus baptizing with fire and Spirit, of clearing out the threshing floor, and of a fire that is unquenchable. At first glance, our rite of baptism seems mild by comparison. A few sprinkles of water, a few words from the pastor, a few promises of parents, sponsors, and congregation hardly seem enough to be as transformative as the fire and Spirit that John the Baptist talks about.

But, do not underestimate what God does with water, promise, and the kindling flame of faith. Because baptism is just the beginning of this Spirit-led journey. By the flickering flame of faith, God can move mountains and transform lives and even raise the dead with these promises. And God does, again and again. By joining our lives to Christ through the



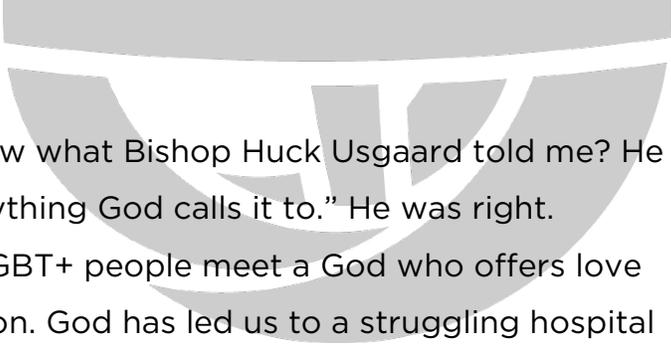


waters of baptism what is Christ's becomes ours. And what is ours become Christ's. Martin Luther called this the happy exchange. It's happy for us, in that when our lives are joined to Christ's through water and the Word, we are made new, and we take on the gifts of Jesus. The burden of shame, the regrets we carry, the feeling that we'll never quite measure up are washed away. Past and future sins are forgiven, lifted from us and taken on by Christ on the cross. In their place, we are given Christ's grace, love, mercy, wholeness, acceptance and the gift of relationship with the Spirit. This Spirit dwells in us to give us faith to trust that what Jesus does is true and really for us.

I'm not sure many of us shy Lutherans boldly claim this, or always know what to do with such a gift, but we have every right to claim it - not because of anything we've done, but because of the incredibly generous God who claims us in the water and promise of baptism. Perhaps that's why Luther encouraged Christians to remember their baptism every time they washed their face, or every time they encountered water. Because when we remember our baptism, we remember who God has made us to be. And when we remember who God has made us to be, we remember that we are called into the world to share the precious gift of life, new life, that we've been given.

Here's how we can share this gift. Share it with our neighbors, especially those who are hurting in body, mind, or spirit. Bless others with grace and hospitality, with forgiveness and understanding. Make room for other's struggles and pain. Love like Jesus and meet people where they are. See how God makes beauty and diversity and complexity to express God's relationship with this big wide and wonderful world. As God's people there's no need to fear what is complex or paradoxical. God tends to show up in odd and mysterious ways. Accept yourself for who you are, flaws and all; because you are treasured and loved by God. Know that as God says to Jesus, "With you I am well pleased," as God's children, the same is true for us. God says to you, "With you I am well pleased." This is a word for all who live by faith, and it's Word for the whole Church who live out God's call.

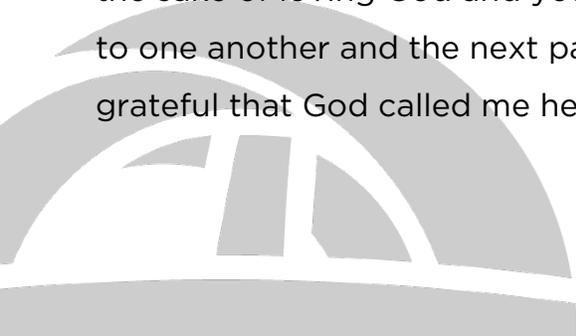


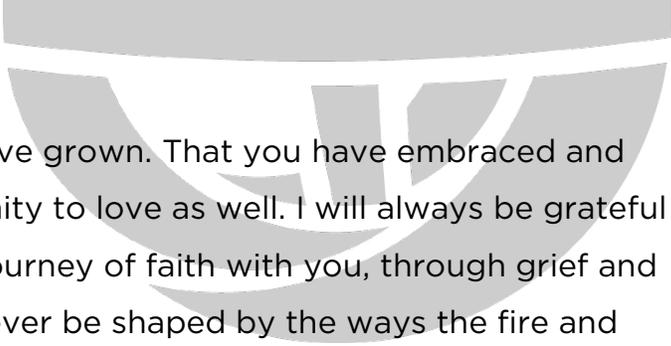


When I came here eleven years ago, do you know what Bishop Huck Usgaard told me? He said, “Jason, Zumbro is a church that can do anything God calls it to.” He was right. Together, God has led us to be a place where LGBT+ people meet a God who offers love and acceptance, not judgment and condemnation. God has led us to a struggling hospital in the middle of rural Tanzania where the relationships and partnership has grown beyond any of our expectations. God has led a community of refugees from South Sudan to this place and called us into relationship, not only to share space, but to share in the work of the Gospel. God has led us to start a food truck ministry that has built bridges and filled hungry people along Marion Road with good things – physically, emotionally, and spiritually. God has led us to open our building to college students studying to be future nurses, and IT professionals, non-profit leaders, scientists and researchers. God has led us to create space for our own young people to ask big questions about a big and generous God and the world and justice and what is right. God has led us to a partnership with LSS that will literally save the lives of young people in our community who are without permanent housing. If this is not the work of the Spirit and the fire of God coursing through the church; friends, I’m not sure what is.

Whether we shout it from the roof tops or just allow that fire of the Spirit to burn steadily through our everyday lives, the fire of faith and the power of the Spirit are being lived out in and through you, not because of what any pastor has done, but because of the God who is Lord of this and every church. I have seen it and participated in it again and again with you over the years. You have let your light shine and that fire burn in so many ways. Often, I have left events here or come back from a trip with you and could almost hear God’s voice say to this church, “Beloved, with you I am well pleased.”

Here’s the thing, the fire of the Spirit is eternal – and will continue to do powerful things in and through you. My prayer is that you will continue to listen for and sense this Spirit, continue to be curious about what new thing God will do next, continue to take risks for the sake of loving God and your neighbors, and continue to offer the same grace and love to one another and the next pastors who come that you have offered me. I will forever be grateful that God called me here when I was a young and relatively inexperienced pastor.





That you were willing to journey with me as I have grown. That you have embraced and loved my family and given them a faith community to love as well. I will always be grateful for the ways you have allowed me to walk the journey of faith with you, through grief and celebration, through trials and growth. I will forever be shaped by the ways the fire and the Spirit have moved in and through us, and I look forward to what God does in this place - through you - next. Thanks be to God. Amen.

