

Conley Memorial Presbyterian Church, Second Sunday of Easter, April 23, 2017

Divine Revelations
Dr. Kenneth Humphreys
April 23, 2017

Psalm 29, Isaiah 42:1-9, Acts 10:34-43, Matthew 3:13-17

Typically I conduct a service of reaffirmation of baptism on the second Sunday of January, Baptism of the Lord Sunday. Of course, our service on that day cancelled due to heavy snow and freezing conditions. I therefore tried to think of a suitable Sunday to do the reaffirmation of baptism and thought "What better day could there be than the Second Sunday of Easter?"

Psalm 29 which we read at the beginning of this service of worship is an announcement of God as Lord over the universe and all that is in it. It reveals the scope of God's unlimited authority. It is a divine revelation.

Isaiah 42 reveals that God, and only God, is able to accomplish new things and that he will accomplish many new things through a Servant who he will name. "*Here is my servant whom I uphold, my chosen one in whom I delight; I will put my Spirit on him and he will bring justice to the nations.*" And who might that Servant be?

To the Jews in the time of Isaiah the Servant was unidentified. It may have been an individual or any number of people who were ordained to do the work of God. Whoever the Servant (or servants) might be, whatever was accomplished was accomplished with the divine blessing of God and with God's authority and power. The Servant(s) might have been believed to be prophets, kings or the long awaited Messiah. The Jews didn't know.

To many Christians, and clearly to Matthew, this passage of scripture from Isaiah is a divine revelation of the coming of God's Son, Jesus the Christ. The parallel with the words "*Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen one in whom I delight*" with the words of God following Jesus' baptism, "*This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased*" is unmistakable.

Matthew's story of Jesus' baptism is intimately tied to the reading from Isaiah. In Matthew, Jesus is revealed by God to be his ultimate Servant. "*I will put my Spirit on him, and he will bring justice to the nations.*"

In the reading from Acts, we hear, *“God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power ... he went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with him.”*

“... God was with him,” a divine revelation. He was God’s Servant!

The reading goes further to say *“He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one whom God appointed as judge of the living and the dead ... everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.”* This is another divine revelation.

Those who believe in him are charged to preach and testify to the people. Those who believe in him are also servants of God.

When you were baptized as a Christian, you became one of God’s servants. If you were baptized as an infant, your parents pledged to bring you up in the nurture and understanding of Christ and at your confirmation you formally accepted your servanthood for God and Christ.

In 1 Peter 3:21 we read that baptism *“... now saves you also--- not [as] the removal of dirt from the body but [as] the pledge of a good conscience toward God.”*

John Burkhart ⁽¹⁾ said, *“... baptism is truly the Lord’s welcome.”* Your baptism was your welcome to the Lord’s servanthood.

Burkhart also said, *“Baptizing ... was not a spit bath. It was not a rinsing but a rescue operation.”* It was rescue from sin and introduction into the servanthood of Christ.

Jesus, of course, was baptized as an adult, not as an infant. He was about thirty years of age when he was baptized. Why then? Why not earlier?

Possibly it was cultural because in Israel those who entered public life, a life of servanthood, customarily did so at that age. In one of his sermons, Fred Craddock ⁽²⁾ speculated on why Jesus went to John to be baptized when he did. Craddock said:

Why now? That’s a good question ... It is a good question if someone sixty years old comes [for baptism]. Why now? It is a good question if someone twelve years old comes ... [and] awkwardly stands on one foot then the other, and finally asks,

“Uh, can I be baptized?”

“You want to be baptized?”

“I want to be baptized.”

“Have you been thinking about this very long?”

“Ever since I was little.”

“Well, how old are you now?”

“Twelve.”

“And you have been thinking about this since you were little?”

“Yes.”

“Have you talked to your folks about it?”

“Well I mentioned it once to my mother. I don’t talk to Dad much about this sort of thing.”

“Well, what did your mother say?”

“She said to talk to you.”

“OK. Let’s talk about it. Why do you want to be baptized, why now, why you, now?”

“I don’t know.”

Why now indeed? Why do parents bring their infant children to be baptized? Why do confirmands who were not baptized as infants, come for baptism typically at about twelve years of age as was the boy in Craddock’s story?

We don’t always realize why, but we do it. We, or our parents for us, acknowledge our servanthood in Jesus Christ. It is a divine revelation whether or not we realize it.

Why do we as baptized Christians reaffirm our own baptisms? In part, it is a celebration of Christ’s baptism but more importantly it is public recognition that our original baptism was a divine revelation that we were entering into a life of servanthood to God and Christ.

Thanks be to God. **Amen.**

(1) John E. Burkhardt, “Worship: A Searching Examination of the Liturgical Experience,” The Westminster Press, Philadelphia, 1982

(2) Fred B. Craddock, “The Cherry Log Sermons,” Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville, 2001

Note: All scripture quotations are from the New International Version of the Bible, 2011.