

Study And Preaching Notes

The Baptism of Our Lord- Sunday, January 7, 2007

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Isaiah 43:1- 7

But now thus says the Lord, he who created you, O Jacob, he who formed you, O Israel: Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine. 2When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you.

3For I am the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior. I give Egypt as your ransom, Ethiopia and Seba in exchange for you. 4Because you are precious in my sight, and honored, and I love you, I give people in return for you, nations in exchange for your life. 5Do not fear, for I am with you; I will bring your offspring from the east, and from the west I will gather you; 6I will say to the north, "Give them up," and to the south, "Do not withhold; bring my sons from far away and my daughters from the end of the earth— 7everyone who is called by my name, whom I created for my glory, whom I formed and made."

- This passage is usually credited by scholars as being post- exile. God's people are expecting great things. The Jews have been through a lot, they are yearning for hope and victory (salvation). They are also mad- the Jews feel as if they have been mistreated, and they want a little revenge. With god's help, they want to be the toughest kid on the block.
- "Do not fear, for I am with you..." (v.5) *Fear* is a powerful emotion- it can motivate, paralyze, cause chaos, etc. How is God helping His people to overcome their fears? What kinds of fears hold them in captivity? What are our fears? How do we deal with them? As Christians living with the gift of the Holy Spirit and under the light of the Gospel, how do we confront fear?
- "I have called you by name, you are mine." (v.1) In our baptism we are marked with the sign of the cross as claimed as God's children. God's working powerfully through our baptism, where do we see Him "walking with us."? What kind of things is God up doing?

- The new names will be Hephzibah ("My delight is in her) and Beulah ("married")
- "The ideal relationship of Israel to Yahweh is described under the metaphor of marriage. A literal translation of v 5a would be: "Just as a young man marries a virgin, so your sons will marry you." This might refer to the repopulation of Jerusalem. The NRSV and many modern commentators emend the word "your sons" to "your builder" (this only requires a change in the vowels, not the consonants). With this change, both halves of the verse refer to the marriage of Yahweh and Jerusalem." - *Ralph W. Klein, Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago.*
- God's got a plan for us...

Acts 8:14- 17

Now when the apostles at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had accepted the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them. 15The two went down and prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit 16(for as yet the Spirit had not come upon any of them; they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus). 17Then Peter and John laid their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit.

- Pay particular attention to verse 14 and the passive use of the word "accepted" in reference to the word of God. God's word and salvation comes to us freely, we do not earn it, seize it, or take it- rather we accept it as a freely offered gift. Of course, the converse of this is what happens if we *reject* it?
- "Philip had conducted a mission to Samaria and done much the same kind of thing which Jesus himself had done. He had preached the good news of the kingdom of God and performed miracles of healing, including exorcisms. It was, then, real Christianity which reached Samaria. This fulfilled the instruction Acts 1:8 that the witness spread to from Jerusalem and Judea to Samaria. Twice Luke makes Samaritans heroes in the account of Jesus' ministry, once in the famous parable and a second time when only a Samaritan of ten healed lepers gives thanks. John 4 may also allude to the early mission to Samaria." - *W.Loader*
- Notice (vvs.15- 16) that there is a separation of faith from the receiving of the Spirit. This would appear to be somewhat strange as

we have been lead to believe through Paul that the Spirit evokes faith. It appears throughout his letters that Paul never indicates a separation, because he sees faith as responding to the offer of a relationship by entering it and that meant becoming connected to Christ through the Spirit. Luke, however, tends to think of the Spirit less in terms of the fruits, which Paul enunciates in Gal 5:22- 23 and more in terms of the gifts which Paul mentions in 1 Corinthians 12. In effect he is saying: people do not manifest the gifts necessarily at once. They may come later. But, in fact, he is doing a lot more. He is intimating that the Spirit needs to be conveyed by the right people. Philip was not good enough. It needed the apostles to come down.

- This probably reflects the authority problem which Luke is having in his day with people like those who followed Simon. One of the ways to deal with this was to claim that there are authorized channels for the Spirit. It really does have the effect of setting up "middlemen" between people and God who act as brokers. They need to come and lay on hands if the Spirit is to come to people. Luke's other stories run somewhat counter to this. In his story of Pentecost the Spirit does not need church leaders to dispense it. The same is true in Acts 10 with Cornelius and his friends. Luke may not have been aware that his political concern to argue for tighter control in the church (at Simon's expense - but also Philip and the Samaritans believers!) had the potential to create a monster. - *W.Loader*
- It also created a theological anomaly and put much more emphasis on the manifestations of the gift of the Spirit than Paul would ever have tolerated. In recent times it has also led some Christian groups to speak of a two stage process of being a believer: first, conversion (with baptism in water) and then second blessing or being baptized in the Spirit. It becomes a belief that God virtually comes to us in bit and pieces, holding something back. It is usually we human beings who do the holding back! Such a theology runs counter to a relational understanding of faith according to which we enter a relationship and engage in the process of deepening it. Paul had to deal with these kinds of distortions in 1 Corinthians when he wrote his famous love chapter to try to shift the emphasis away from the gifts and wonders and onto love.
- For many who belong to generations of Christian believers baptism takes place before a conscious faith even develops and such baptism also celebrates the movement of the Spirit in a person's life. This should never be distorted into an understanding of baptism as doing anything automatically or magically. Rather, when it occurs with families and small children, baptism really is celebrating that these

children are being placed in the stream (the community) in which the Spirit flows and that this happens and will continue to happen, as they participate in that stream. Our understanding of the formative influence of communities on young human life help us make very good sense these days of what baptism of infants is celebrating.

- At all the various levels of human development which follow there will be a response of faith appropriate to that level. Baptism, the Spirit, and the responses of faith should never be separated. For such people the baptism celebrated over them continues to be a symbol of the grace which has been reaching them and to which they now respond in ever new ways. It is not so very different even when a young adult is baptized. There is still much growing to do. A wedding does not make a marriage; nor does baptism make an ongoing relationship of faith or a walking in the Spirit.
- God has plan for His church...

Luke 13:15- 17,21- 22

15As the people were filled with expectation, and all were questioning in their hearts concerning John, whether he might be the Messiah, 16John 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. He 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, 22and the Holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased."

- People appear to be drawn to John the Baptist...His message of starting anew with a clean life and new ethical standards appear to have resonated with the crowds whom gather to hear his speak.
- Of course all of this talk is intended to "prepare" the way for the coming of Jesus (vvs3- 6). John's no smooth talker, he chastises and condemns those who simply want to have a baptism but have no real

desire to repent or change their ways (v.7). John warned those who came to hear him speak that being Jewish was no guarantee of salvation or even being part of God's heavenly plan.

- If Christ was indeed the Son of God, why did he need to be baptized? many thoughts exist on this subject, but one that sticks out for me is the notion that Christ represents humanity, and thus is providing us with a divine example of how we are to approach God. For we are sinners and need to be cleansed daily.
- Notice that Christ begins and ends his ministry with a prayer to his father. From his baptism in the Jordan to his last breath on the cross, Christ lives a prayerful life and ministry. Again, an example is being provided for us of how we are to live and approach our "Father in heaven".
- "Here it begins: the baptism of Jesus is the occasion of his calling. Even in Matthew and Luke, which begin with stories about his birth and identity, his baptism is the inception of the main narrative. It is here that the adult Jesus shows up on the stage of history.

In this event, baptism means more than repentance and cleansing. Here baptism issues in the anointing of the Holy Spirit, the giving of redemptive identity. God says to Jesus: "You are my Son, the Beloved." Although this epiphany is a public revelation in our telling of the story, the words come intimately to the praying Jesus, not to an audience of eavesdroppers.

Much lies ahead for Jesus from this point. He must live out this identity and meet expectations laid on him. Look how John has been speaking about the anointed one already; remember how the crowds will project their hopes and desires on him.

Jesus' baptism thus leads us to consider the meaning of "vocation," a word that has lost much of its resonance through repeated use, both secular and churchly. Vocatio means calling, but "calling" often denotes simply job or career, chosen profession or peculiar task. The notion that it is God who calls seems a commonplace piety when we are talking about "church vocations," calls to "ministry" or "the religious life," but it sounds more like an afterthought or theological overlay in regard to ordinary life. Vocations are the way we make our livings, and avocations -- the things we don't have to do -- provide our recreation." -- *J. Stendahl*

- God has a plan for us in Christ...