

BAPTISM OF ELEANOR STROH | OCTOBER 9, 2021

AMOS 5:6-7, 10-15 | MARK 10:17-31

This is going to be for Ellie, but if the rest of you want to listen in, that's fine.

Ellie, you are being baptized today. You are not going to be doing much. In fact, you are hardly going to be doing anything. But I am going to be doing something. Your parents are going to be doing something. Your aunt and uncle are going to be doing something. Everyone here is going to be doing something. And, most important, God is going to be doing something, too.

When your parents come up here in just a minute, I'll ask if they want to have you baptized into Christ. But what does that mean? What does it mean to be baptized into Christ? We could spend all afternoon answering that question, but I'm going to give you three simple answers.

First, your baptism is about Jesus. In the gospels of St. Matthew, St. Mark, and St. Luke, Jesus begins his public ministry by being baptized. Those stories are all slightly different, but they have the same basic outline. Jesus is baptized by John the Baptist, and a voice from the heavens says, "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased."

When you are baptized today, you are sharing in Jesus's baptism. So that what God said about Jesus, God now says about you. "You are my beloved child, whom I love. With you I am well pleased." In our baptisms, the Holy Spirit brings us to the place where Jesus is so that Jesus's relationship with the one he calls the Father is now our relationship. That's why we say that we're baptized into Jesus. Baptism brings you to the place where Jesus is so that his life, his relationship, his Spirit is given to you. You are baptized into a relationship.

Second, your baptism is about who you consider yourself to be. It's about your identity, your sense of who you are. One of the ways that we construct our identities is by telling stories. Your family has stories that they tell. Your family in particular has a lot of stories. And the reason they tell those stories isn't because they're terribly interesting, although some of them are. It's because they remind people of who they are.

There are all kinds of stories that people tell about us, and we tell ourselves. And they're usually right in front of our faces. They're so pervasive that you'll start taking them for granted. They won't be stories, they'll just be life. You'll hear that what's really important about you is how many friends you have. Or how high your SAT score is. Or how much money you make. Or how big your house is. These stories are conspicuous, but they aren't true.

Baptism gives you a different story. Because in your baptism, you are a part of God's story. Baptism is who you really are, the most fundamentally true thing about you that's not contingent on anything else. That story isn't conspicuous, you will need your community to remind you of it, to tell the story to you, but it's the truest thing about you. You are baptized into an identity.

And third, your baptism is something you use. Today isn't just a ritual we do because you're one, and we want to have a party. Your baptism is actually useful to you. And you use your baptism whenever you trust God's promises to you. And trusting God's promises doesn't simply change how we see ourselves, but it changes how we view other people.

We believe that Jesus has been raised from death and is still bringing about the kingdom of God within and among us today. So for you to be baptized into Jesus doesn't mean that you have some special status that makes you superior to other people or gets you out of having to think about the world's problems. In fact, it's the exact opposite. You have been baptized into Jesus. And Jesus is always on the margins of our society, our plans, and our attention.

The word we use for this accompaniment in church is "mission," which means "sent." So your entire life has some sort of direction to it. You don't need to find your purpose in life, because

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it's already been given to you. In fact, we'll say it later this morning. "Bear God's creative and redeeming word to all the world." You can figure out the specifics, but never doubt that your life isn't useful. You are baptized into a purpose.

That's really what baptism is all about. You are baptized into a relationship. You are baptized into an identity. And you are baptized into a purpose. All because you are baptized into Christ.

Thanks be to God for the ways that you, Ellie, and the ways your life and witness will enrich our church, our community, and our creation.

Joseph Schattauer Paillé, Pastor