



Can Anything Good Come Out of Nazareth?

John 1:43–51

“Very truly I tell you, you will see ‘heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man.’”

January 18, 2015

Thought For The Week

Scriptures: Isaiah 42: 1-4, 6,7 • Acts 10: 34-38 • Mark 1: 7-11

Phillip introduces Nathaniel to Jesus

It has often occurred to me, as a Christian, that many of the most significant events of our life occur at an age when we are scarcely able to recognize their future importance. I am thinking, for instance, of the sacrament of baby blessings. In my own instance, I was blessed as a newly born baby. Of course, I must have been aware of being handed over to the Elder, because my mother told me later that I cried for a bit but soon settled down to, what appeared to be, enjoying the moment. Other than that, of course, I recall nothing of that one-time important event in my life.

Nonetheless, it is important to remember that some important people in my life at that moment, my mother and father, members of our congregation in Highland Park and our pastor; thought it important enough to welcome me into the Body of Christ. Although I remember my baptism quite clearly at the age of eight, I do not remember much about my confirmation or anything of my First Communion. But my parents made sure that I was well prepared spiritually to claim worthiness at the Lord's Table.

I do recall some of my pre-baptismal classes, because unlike a lot of my friends, I enjoyed studying the scriptures when I was young. This was especially true when I began studying the ministry of Paul the Apostle. Maybe the name caught my attention, who knows, however, I couldn't get enough of Paul's travels thru what is now known as Asia Minor.

Finally, I do remember the day of my Ordination, mainly because it was a beautiful fall day at our Detroit International Stake Fall Conference in 1959 and I was very excited about becoming a Deacon.

All in all, I was ushered into the Body of Christ because some people had confidence that I would some day be willing to accept the responsibilities associated with each individual sacrament. So, the point of all this is to say that a certain amount of responsibility is tied in with each sacrament: loyalty to the faith at baptism, devotion to the sacrament of Communion, loyalty to the Church in confirmation and leadership in the sacrament of Ordination. Little of this future accountability appears clear to us at that moment, but believe me, it will surely become evident at a later time.

Given that entire introduction, let's turn to the event in the life of Jesus of Nazareth whose baptism in the river Jordan we can recall and maybe even recite from memory some of the verses in the New Testament that cover this most important event. First, let it be said that Jesus did not initiate this holy sacrament. He learned of it through hearsay of the people who lived in and around Jerusalem. There was news of a certain penitent preacher, John, who was inviting people to a certain spot on the Jordan River where he was preaching a message of repentance and an accompanying rite of immersion. And so, it is said that Jesus also came to the Jordan to receive this baptism of repentance at the hands of John.

We have no evidence that Jesus' baptism was any different than that of the others who came for the washing on that momentous day. There was, however, a certain remembrance by the local people that day of what happened when Jesus came up out of the water. A great cloud appeared overhead and it

was recalled that a voice was heard from above declaring that Jesus was to be remembered as God's most favored Son. Have you ever asked yourself, "Why the cloud"? I have, and after careful thought, it came to me that we are speaking of a very *arid* area. Clouds, especially large ones, are not a common event. I once spent three months in Oklahoma at the expense of the US Army. During that time, I played a lot of baseball & softball when I wasn't working at Post Headquarters. Now, if you haven't played these sports, you may not understand the value of clouds. Without them, it's very difficult to catch a fly ball (no background to determine the ball's proximity to, hopefully, your glove). In Oklahoma, it was quite *arid* too. It was common to see one tiny little cloud in the sky that you could hide behind a quarter that you held in the air. So when these people, gathered at the Jordan River, saw a big (white) cloud, that seemingly came out of nowhere, it was a really big event. The voice of God was said to come from within the cloud.

Nothing more was recalled by the people at that moment but from other scriptures we know that when Jesus came up out of the water he immediately went out into the wilderness where he spent considerable time reflecting on the words, "you are my beloved Son." Undoubtedly, Jesus must have asked himself what those words meant but also what it could mean for his future life. We do know from the scriptures that he began to go about Galilee preaching the message of the kingdom of God.

Recalling that scriptural incident, we have no sense of the relation of the baptism to Jesus' work, but it is evident that he heard some sort of call at that moment and that he eventually followed up on the meaning of the words that he heard.

It is hardly imaginable that any of us heard a mystical call at our own baptism, but in due time we did learn that something of great mystery happened at that moment, an invitation to respond to the meaning of the sacrament. Whether we knew it or not, a sacred responsibility was handed to us and laid upon us, an accountability that would develop and last throughout our entire life. When you think about all this, the responsibility sounds rather frightening unless we realize that God's divine gift accompanied the sacrament and will continue to belong to us for the remainder of our life.

Now, that's something to think about.

Stewardship Thought for the Week

Are you willing to take this pledge?

I pledge:

To educate our Community of Christ members and friends about Christian stewardship practices

To facilitate the sharing of stewardship experiences, beliefs and practices

To assist in providing a support network for individuals who are considering incorporating stewardship into their everyday way of life

To serve as a resource for stewardship to other Community of Christ Congregations within the Michigan Region

To help create and maintain a resource bank of materials, speakers, programs, conferences, trainers and mentors

To provide resources for new friends who may not attend a church practicing stewardship

*"The land is mine and you are but aliens and my tenants.
Throughout the country that you hold as a possession,
you must provide for the redemption of the land." Lev. 25:23-24*