

Remember Your Baptism
Matthew 3:1-2, 13-17 and Galatians 3:26-28

I don't remember the particulars of the day. I don't remember if the water was cold or if I was scared. I don't remember how old I was or what I was wearing. I don't remember how many other persons were baptized along with me. I don't remember what hymns were sung or what words were spoken.

What I do remember is that I was "held back" a year from entering baptism class: an embarrassment for a PK. I had made what I thought was a helpful suggestion to my father: that the deacons should pass chocolate chip cookies and Kool-Aid down the aisles for the kids at the same time that they passed communion trays to the adults, so we could have a snack in the middle of worship, too. My dad was not amused. He declared that if I didn't take communion seriously, then I was not ready for baptism class.

I remember baptism class, too. It was organized into a series of lock-ins, in conjunction with the other Disciple church in town. We played cops and robbers when we weren't in serious study.

But I don't remember my actual baptism. Do you?

Some of us were baptized as infants, some as preteens, some as adults. Some among us may not yet be baptized.

But when you hear the expression "remember your baptism," it's not so much the details that are important. Perhaps it would be better phrased "remember that you are baptized."

For the CC(DOC), our tradition is "believer's baptism." This means it is our preference that the baptized individual is old enough to know and understand for themselves what kind of commitment they are making when they present themselves for baptism. We prefer they have studied the scriptures and the history of the Church, that they have learned about the meaning of the rituals they are entering into, and that they have consciously made the decision on their own to confess their personal faith and profess a desire to follow Jesus' example in their lives.

We practice a baptism by immersion because, after all, it's Biblical! Immersion was the method by which John the Baptist baptized Jesus in the Jordan River. And the Greek word *baptizo* from which we get our word "baptize" means to dip, submerge, or immerse.

Although there are many techniques and methods for immersing someone into the waters of baptism, the most common method is for the candidate to be lowered backward into the waters, rather than face forward or squatting straight down. The reasons for this are symbolic: baptism is considered a death to the old self and a resurrection into new life with Jesus Christ. Therefore when one is lowered backward, it symbolizes the position one lays in death. Some even cross their arms across their chests as they are lowered.

Despite the preference for a believer's baptism by immersion, we are (after all) Disciples. We have been known, from our start on the American frontier, for our desire to unite all Christians and look for commonalities, rather than focus on differences. Thus we validate any form of Christian baptism. New Disciples are not required to be re-baptized. The grace of God bestowed on individuals at baptism holds up no matter your age or the technique by which you were baptized. All are welcome as Disciples!

Our denomination's website, Disciples.org, states: "Baptism is a public act by which the church proclaims God's grace, as revealed in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, through the use of a visible sign of God's gracious initiative and the human individual's response in faith. With other Christians we affirm that baptism is at once a divine gift and a human response."

When we remember our baptism, we remember this grace that we have experienced. We remember the unending love God has for each and every one of us.

When we remember our baptism, we remember the sacrificial act of Jesus Christ on the cross. We remember our commitment to follow Christ's example.

When we remember our baptism, we remember the presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives. We remember there is a little bit of holy inside each of us.

When we remember our baptism, we remember that we are part of the universal fellowship of the Church. We are part of a faith community that loves and supports us, that challenges us and helps us to grow spiritually.

We are part of the priesthood of all believers. We are ministers of God's grace, Christ's love, and the Holy Spirit's presence in our lives and in the world. We are a part of the future of the Church. We are members of a congregation, but simultaneously members of the whole Church of Jesus Christ.

Remember your baptism. Remember who you are. Remember whose you are.

It is said that the great protestant reformer, Martin Luther, carved the words "I am baptized" in the desk where he worked. And he supposedly began each morning by reminding himself of his baptism. He would touch his forehead and say, "I am baptized." For Luther, his Christian baptism was a defining moment that transformed him forever. The act of baptism had changed him, not for a while, but for all his life. Every day he was stirred to remember who and whose he was, and by doing so, commit his life to following Jesus Christ.

Luther took great comfort from the words "I am baptized." When it seemed to him that the whole Church had left the precepts of the Gospel, when he was under scrutiny from Church officials as to the truth of his beliefs, when his life was under threat and when he suffered self-doubt he would boldly claim, "I am baptized."

Those words belong to each and every baptized person. To each of us who have entered the waters of baptism in the name of the Creator, Christ, and Holy Ghost, let those words sink in this morning: "I am baptized!"

When we say "I am baptized!" we are owning up to our membership of the Church universal and claiming a place in it. We also claim the responsibility to make every effort to see that the church flourishes.

As baptized people we know we are children of God, disciples of Christ, and members of the Church. Through these realities our existence is given new vitality, and a sense of meaning, purpose and hope.

In baptism, we are given our identity; we are named with the name of Christ. But this holy act is not an end to itself. Baptism is the beginning of a life-long journey of faith.

Today we will witness, and participate as a faith community, in the baptism of Kaitlyn Rae Moss. Katie has expressed her desire to be baptized and to follow Christ's example in her life. She and her dads and I have spent many hours together discussing what it means to be baptized, the significance of communion, the history of the CC(DOC) and of NCC...Katie presents herself to enter the waters of baptism and emerge a new Christian on the other side of this experience.

As you witness Katie's baptism this day, remember your baptism, as well.

Let us pray:

Living, loving God, remind us of our baptisms. Remind us of the commitments we made that day. As we re-commit ourselves to be followers of Christ, help us also to look to the future of the Church universal, and our role in it as ministers of your gospel. Amen.