



# CHRIST CHURCH CRANBROOK

***The promise, presence, and power of God - The Baptism of Our Lord - 1102021***

I speak to you today as a sinner to sinners, as the beloved of God to God's beloved, as one called to bear witness to those called to bear witness. Amen.

Over the past few days, I've been praying, earnestly, and trying to discern what is the word that God has given me to say today. Because there are many who are speaking words of outrage for good reason, but I don't think I need to repeat those words of outrage. You can find them almost anywhere if you turn on the TV or start up your computer and go on the internet.

What I want to bring me for you today is a slightly different word, a word of invitation, a word that speaks and goes with the grain of the baptism of Christ. A word that begins to describe in some way, shape, or form the slow and steady work of God that is before us today. And I came to this word when I saw an image from January 7th in the Capitol, it's of the representative of New Jersey, Andy Kim.

Shortly after midnight on January 7th, he began to clean up the rotunda. He saw some officers there who had been taking pizza boxes, which had been left behind and were putting them in trash. Then Andy himself grabbed a plastic bag and got on his knees and began to pick up all of the litter and refuse that had been left. And that image of him kneeling down and venerating and reconsecrating space that had been in a sense, defiled, was something that captured my attention at something that spoke to me powerfully.

I did a little research and Andy Kim said that the thought that crossed his mind when he decided to start to clean up, was this: when you see something you love, that's broken, you want to fix it. And as I look at this picture, I am struck not only by the fact that he is doing that kind of humble work, that work that brings him to his knees, that kind of prayerful work, but the small work of veneration he's doing, that ability to fix things little bit by little bit, that willingness to rebuild trust.

When I think about the power of God, when I think about the presence of God, when I think about the promises of God, I think not so much of moments in which we have flexed our muscles. And not so much when we have by will of violence established what we think is the right and the just, but I think about

these moments of humble rebuilding of trust, these moments in which the ties that bind us together are reknit and repaired.

When the things that we hold onto in our lives that matter most, after the shouting is done, after the exercising of our wills, and after all the moments in which we have expressed the outrage that comes to us, at the end of the day, it will be things like what Representative Kim did that will bring this country together. And this picture is a moment for me of someone who's going with the grain of the grace of God, the grace which has made a difference in my life and a difference in our lives together. It's the grace that is the word we speak today. And it's the grace that is missing most, but is most needed.

This picture of Representative Kim on his knees picking up the trash, venerating the space. It's a reminder to me of baptism because standing behind baptism is not just the moment in which we repent of our sins and claim the good news of salvation given to us by Jesus Christ, because baptism is more than repentance. But baptism is something that speaks to us in a more powerful way of the interaction between God and His world. And as I was thinking about this picture, another image came to mind that I think is just as important for us to see. An image that picks up on this same message of the power and presence and promise of God, but now read through the work of baptism.

It's an image from our baptistery in the back of the church. It's this incredible stained glass piece of art that was brought over carefully and installed here from Europe. And in this piece of art, you see the baptism of Jesus, the episode from the gospel of Mark that we speak about today. In it, you have John the Baptist clothed and you find a naked Christ, naked in the same way that he died on the cross. And you have John baptizing this Christ and his eyes are cast down. This is a moment of incredible humility not only for John, not only for the one who said that he was not worthy to untie the sandals of Jesus, but also for Jesus himself.

For Jesus did not need to be baptized, and yet Jesus was baptized because baptism is more than repentance. Baptism is a moment of renewal. Baptism is an incredible expression and manifestation of God's promise to his covenant, which is everlasting, of God's presence in this world, which comes to us only by God's humility and by God's power, God's power in this world to breathe life into death. And in this moment, in this picture, you can see at the bottom of the image, the last words we read in today's gospel, You are my beloved; with You I am well-pleased. You are my beloved Son; with You I am well-pleased.

You and I are called in baptism to be united to Christ. This union with Christ, as I've said before, is a moment in which we activate the promises of God. In which we experience the presence of God and which we are filled with the power of God. And that power is the ability to forgive. That power is the ability to love. That power is the ability to grow. That power is the ability to begin again and again and again. Even when we are faced with death and destruction and

disappointment and disillusionment, the power of God in us through Christ has been given. Because just as Christ is the beloved of God, so all of us who are baptized into His body are God's beloved, too, so that when God looks upon us, it is through the lens of His Son, Jesus.

In addition to the power of God, baptism somehow expresses the presence of God. And it's here that you see the connection between the vulnerable humility that Representative Kim showed in cleaning up the mess afterwards, of picking up the pieces afterwards. All of us experience God in this world most certainly in moments of humility. In moments in which we know ourselves to be vulnerable and alone. We know ourselves to be fragile and full of foibles, we know ourselves to be worthy of being forgotten. And yet baptism is the presence of God. It is the presence of God in us telling us that God will be with us, always through His Son, Jesus.

It is by baptism, that we can say that Christianity makes a claim that is greater than what you find in Buddhism. In Buddhism, I cannot know the Buddha, but in Christianity I can know Jesus. In Christianity, I can know Jesus, not only in a personal relationship in which we know each other as if friends who see each other face to face. But in Christianity, it is Christ who lives in me and gives me the sense of God's presence in everything that happens to me and to you and to us.

And finally, in all of these things, we see the promise of God. And that promise was made to Abraham when He said that He would create a nation out of nothing. And that promise is something that God has kept, even though the people of God forgot that promise often. For that promise was based on a covenant in which God swore by God's self to be with us always. The baptism of Christ is the vindication of that promise.

This is why Martin Luther believed that we should be always ready to remind God even of the promise God made to us in baptism. "Whenever we experience sin," he writes in 1529, "whenever we experience the absence of God in our lives, whenever we are tormented and feel completely overwhelmed in our conscience, we should say to ourselves, 'I am baptized.'" That was the first prayer that Luther told his disciples to engage in. "Remember your baptism when you wash your face," so Luther is said to have said. He said it nowhere that we can find, but it seems to make sense. When you wash your face, remember your baptism. Remember of the word and the water.

Today is a day in which we remember our baptism. At the beginning of this service today, we had an incredible translation of this medieval text: *Jesus autem hodie regressus est ex Jordane*, which says, but today Christ has emerged from the Jordan. Today Christ has emerged from the Jordan, not 2000 years ago, but today, for baptism becomes active whenever we begin to live it out; no matter whether we recognize it or not, in moments of humility, in moments of trust, in

moments of vulnerability, in moments of grace, in moments of love, in moments of resurrection.

So the word I have to give to you today is a word of transformation, a word that reminds us that we have been united to Christ and called Christ's own forever. A word that finds in baptism, the promise, the presence, and the power of God. And to summarize all of these things, I want to finish with a prayer that I read recently written by Steven Shakespeare that is based on the gospel for today.

God of the tearing heaven,  
whose holiness is unveiled  
by one who is submerged  
in all the pain and sin of earth:  
give us faith to follow him  
who goes to the heart of darkness  
bearing only the Spirit  
of gentle insistent peace;  
through Jesus Christ, the promised one. Amen

[End of Recording]