THE BAPTISM OF OUR LORD, B
Genesis 1:1-5
Psalm 29
Acts 19:1-7
Mark 1:4-11

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Over sixty years ago my friend Roger got his first ham radio set. He was in elementary school, and that radio captured his imagination in wonderful way. Every evening little Roger could be found up in his room, hunched over the dials, headset covering his ears, listening and talking with people all over the world. He says that's where it all began. That ham radio was the first step toward his lifelong career as an electronics engineer.

When was the first time you had an inkling of what you were put on this earth to do? For my brother it started back in Boy Scouts, all those weekend camping trips when he fell in love with God's natural world, the plants, the animals. Today he's a wildlife biologist. I had a friend in high school who was in a pantomime troupe with me, and he loved performing so much he ended up going off to the Barnum & Bailey Clown College in Florida. His facebook page shows him dressed in clown costume, even today. And another high school friend who fell in love with Shakespeare, with poetry and literature? Yep, she works at a college, helping other people experience the same kind of learning that meant so much to her.

Each of us has something we've been put on this earth to do. A calling. A vocation. A place where we are meant to use our unique, God-given talents to give life to God's world. Sometimes we live out our calling through a career or job, but not always. It could be through volunteering or hobbies or relationships that we find a place to serve God creatively. And we might not have just one single calling, but rather many ways we use our gifts to serve God over the course of a lifetime.

Often our journeys follow a long and twisting path. We change careers, we move from city to city. Economic changes and other events shape our paths. One door closes, another door opens. And with each opportunity that comes, we have the task of spiritual discernment to see whether it's a place that will give life to us and give life to others. We keep on searching through midlife and other transitions, asking "Could it be time for a change? Where do I belong right now? Where can I best give of myself for God's world?" I once heard a counselor remark that when we're facing this kind of transition, what we're really wishing for is a little bird to land on our windowsill with a note clasped in its tiny beak-- a personal note from God saying, "Here's what you do next." It almost never happens that way, but wouldn't it be great?

I wonder how Jesus learned what he was put on this earth to do. He must have learned a lot in his father Joseph's carpenter shop, but how did he discover his calling from his heavenly father? We don't know for sure, but somehow he found his way to the Jordan River one significant day and was baptized, and on that day

God publicly and officially set him apart for his particular mission as Savior. It was a turning point in Jesus' life. The heavens opened. The Spirit of God descended "like a dove," the scripture says. The voice of God spoke in a loving, approving way: "This is my Son." Through all these signs and wonders, God said: "This one is special. This one is mine. This is the one I will use to change the world and redeem all creation." And so it began.

When you consider your calling, what you've been put on this earth to do, do you ever think about your baptism day? Many of us don't-- but we should. Because baptism is that significant day in our life which marks a turning point, a new chapter of dedication and purpose. When that water of baptism is poured over us and the sign of the cross is traced on our foreheads, never to be erased, it happens for us just as surely as it happened for Jesus. God says of us, "This one is special. This one is mine. This is one of those people I will use to change the world and redeem all creation." For Christians, our day of baptism is the one single event that has the most to say about how our life is to be lived. In baptism we are claimed by God and commissioned to take on a special part of God's work. It remains for us to keep on discovering what that special work will be.

A campus pastor says the biggest questions asked by young adults are: "Who am I?" and "What am I meant to do?" He figures that on any given day, about 90% of the people walking across his campus are asking, "Who am I?" And a fair number of them have already figured out that God has something to do with answering that question. To ask "Who am I?" is to ask, "Who does God want me to be?" What gifts has God given me for serving? How does God want me to share life with the world? What has God put me on this earth to do?

In college, when I was doing a lot of this kind of questioning, I had a poster on the wall of my dorm room that meant a lot to me. The photograph showed a gymnast dressed in a bright red leotard, leaping up to do a beautiful split in mid-air. Her head was lifted high, arms stretched out, toes pointed, every ounce of her energy engaged in beauty and grace. The caption on that poster read, *"Whatever you do, do everything to the glory of God"* (1 Cor 10:31). This quote from First Corinthians was a powerful word for me. I didn't know exactly where I was headed in life, but I knew that *whatever I did, I wanted to do everything for the glory of God.* That's what I still want to do. Live my life to God's praise. Live in a way that gives God glory.

This is God's calling to all of us in baptism. *"Whatever you do, do everything to the glory of God."* Commit yourself to what God loves and cares about. Love others, practice forgiveness, work for peace, strive for justice, help those who are vulnerable or in need, share the good news of God's love with everyone. Wherever you are in life, whatever you do, *"do everything to the glory of God."*

That's a high baptismal calling, and there's one thing I do know. It isn't by our own power that we live this kind of life -- it is by the power of God's Spirit in us. That

same Holy Spirit that descended upon Jesus on his baptism day (like a dove, the scripture says) – that same Spirit has also descended upon us in our baptism. The same Holy Spirit that guided Jesus in his awesome mission is the very same Spirit that guides us in our own life missions. God's Holy Spirit helps us to discover how to live life, not for ourselves and our own needs alone, but to God's glory and praise.

Have you been looking for a little bird to land on your windowsill and tell you what to do next in life? The truth is, you have that little bird with you already. You have God's gentle dove, God's Holy Spirit, always present with you, always perching somewhere very nearby. Sometimes God's Holy Spirit-dove swoops down dramatically to catch our attention in an unmistakable way (like the way it swooped down at Jesus' baptism), but more often God's Spirit-dove hovers quietly nearby. So, be still. Ask. Listen. And let God's Spirit offer you gentle inspiration, encouragement, the hints and guidance we all need to find our way.

The power for all this comes from love-- not our love, but first of all, God's love for us. What did God say to Jesus at his baptism? God didn't say, "Here's my plan for your life. Here's a step-by-step outline for your ministry." No-- at Jesus' baptism, God first of all spoke God's love and approval for Jesus, and it was God's love and approval that sent Jesus out. "Here is my Son," God said that day. "The one I love. The one with whom I am well pleased." God spoke God's love to Jesus, and in the power of that love, Jesus went on to share God's love with all of us.

For us, too, it all starts with God's love.

I know a man who practices a very unusual spiritual discipline. When he gets up in the morning, he heads for the bathroom mirror. As he looks in that mirror at his unshaven face and his tousled hair, his bleary eyes and his fuzzy teeth, and he says to his image: "God delights in you." That's how this man starts every day. He says to himself, "God delights in you." Takes a lot of nerve, don't you think? Actually, this is a man who understands his baptism very well and who <u>trusts</u> his baptism. He understands that in baptism God is saying to US-- "YOU are my beloved son, YOU are my beloved daughter. I delight in you. I cherish you. I treasure you. I love you. And because I love you, I am sending you to share my love with my whole world."

This is what we are put on earth to do. May every blessing be yours as you live out this awesome call. Amen.