

THE BAPTISM OF JESUS  
SUNDAY, JANUARY 10, 2016  
MARK 1:9-13; MARK 2:1-22

1 of 8

Sisters and brothers in Christ, grace to you and peace from God our Creator, from our Savior Jesus Christ, and from the life-giving, in-dwelling Holy Spirit. AMEN

Here's a confession: I have been quite crabby over the past week as I've struggled with where I belong and with whether or not I am enough, that is, whether or not I am sufficient to the tasks that lie ahead of me.

With this burgeoning awareness - trite and childish as it is - I arrived back at Southwest High School after two weeks of winter break, prepared to hop-to on costuming this year's musical, "Guys and Dolls". To help the techies get to know one another and bond a bit, we planned to watch the 1955 movie. In order to project the DVD from my computer, I needed a little white connector that I call a "pigtail", which I don't own. I went first to my colleagues in the performing arts office where it turned out, indeed, our director/my boss, had said "pigtail". As she handed it to me she said, "I don't like people knowing I have this because everyone will want to borrow it and I'll lose it in about a day, so I only give it out to people I love and trust."

Bam! I felt better! Seriously!

These were not deep, heart-felt declarations of affection and friendship, but it struck me, in that moment, that in order for her to say such a thing - maybe especially so lightly and in passing - there must be some truth to it: I felt affirmed by her trust; clearly any failings on my part had been automatically forgiven, as evidenced by the simple acknowledgement - summed up in the term "love" - that I am seen as a trustworthy member of the theater family.

I headed to our movie viewing like a new person. Ironically, we wound up not needing the pigtail, because the students opted not to watch the movie, but instead had some really exciting, creative, mutually affirming conversations, which reinforced my sense of being right where I belong, and I'm confident, encouraged my costuming kids to feel confident that they were appreciated and were right where they belong.

This is what Jesus is up to - in general/throughout his ministry - but especially and particularly in our readings this morning: handing out pigtails. Unlike my boss, with her prerequisite of affection and trust, Jesus is handing out pigtails to establish affection and trust, just as he, himself, received a "pigtail", if you will, in his baptism.

The Narrative Lectionary gave us these great turn-around stories from the early part of Jesus' ministry. Traditionally, the First Sunday after Epiphany - which is today - is the celebration of Jesus' Baptism. Mark's account of Jesus' baptism, even though we just read it the Sunday after Christmas, makes a perfect preamble to Mark's reversal stories, showing us how Jesus' offering of affection and trust, that is, healing and forgiveness, stem from his own reception of affection and trust in his baptism: "You are my beloved child. With you I am well pleased."

For it is fresh from his baptism that Jesus moves into a world full of hurt. Knowing to whom he belongs and by whom he is loved, Jesus starts handing out pigtails, and turns peoples' hurt around: from broken and despised individuals into beloved, belonging, forgiven community members. And Jesus turns our relationship with God around: trading old wine skins of piety and ritual cleansing - which lead to endless doubt as to whether or not one has done enough -

THE BAPTISM OF JESUS  
SUNDAY, JANUARY 10, 2016  
MARK 1:9-13; MARK 2:1-22

2 of 8

trading those old wine skins in for new skins from which God is pouring out the new wine of rampant forgiveness: forgiveness not contingent upon deserving, upon sacrifice, even upon asking: without one plea, the paralyzed walk; without a word of repentance, the sinner is forgiven; without a nod of acknowledgement, the despised is invited to be both host and beloved wedding guest. Jesus' ministry is about the topsy-turvy power of radical forgiveness.

.....

CLICK - NEWBORN WITH CAL



This is our niece, Giulia Grace; Gigi, for short. She has been - from the moment anyone knew of her existence in my sister's womb - a beloved child. When she was born into this world, she was received as I would wish every child to be received - as the most beloved child to ever exist; not with lavish gifts or extraordinary parties, but with every single person around her wanting to hold her, sing to her, shower her with love, and welcome her as one who absolutely and unequivocally belongs with us.

Gigi is now four years old. As she's grown...

CLICK - IN PINK WITH SAR



THE BAPTISM OF JESUS  
SUNDAY, JANUARY 10, 2016  
MARK 1:9-13; MARK 2:1-22

3 of 8

...she has developed her own personality,

CLICK - IN PINK ON CAL'S BACK



...including a few traits some might consider not quite “belove-able”.

CLICK - THREE FINGERS ON NOSE



But she absolutely remains a beloved child in our hearts.

CLICK - IN ZEBRAS WITH SAR

THE BAPTISM OF JESUS  
SUNDAY, JANUARY 10, 2016  
MARK 1:9-13; MARK 2:1-22

4 of 8



She knows where she belongs and she knows she is deeply loved.

CLICK - WOODLAND MUFFIN BAKING



Also, as she's grown,

THE BAPTISM OF JESUS  
SUNDAY, JANUARY 10, 2016  
MARK 1:9-13; MARK 2:1-22

5 of 8

[CLICK - WOODLAND STICK 4](#)



...you may have noticed that her hair has grown.

[CLICK - WOODLAND WATER 2](#)



We got these photos - from a walk in the woods just a few weeks ago - for Christmas, this year.

[CLICK - WOODLAND WATER](#)



THE BAPTISM OF JESUS  
SUNDAY, JANUARY 10, 2016  
MARK 1:9-13; MARK 2:1-22

6 of 8

Notice, please, her lovely, wavy locks.

I got a call from my mom on Thursday night saying, rather dramatically, “Gigi got a haircut”.

I, of course, thought she’d gotten her hair snagged in something, got peanut butter or gum in it, or cut it herself, with this melodramatic pronouncement by my mother.

Turns out, my sister Sarah took Gigi in for her first-ever hair trimming.

As my sister’s long-time hairdresser began to work on Gigi’s hair, she said, rather casually, “Gigi would you be interested in giving your hair to a little girl who doesn’t have any?” To which Gigi replied, “What?” The stylist, said, “There are some little girls who are too sick or who have to be on medicine that makes them not able to grow their own hair. So, I was wondering if you would be willing to give some of your hair to make into a wig for one or two of those little girls.”

Gigi knows all about wigs, since both of her parents are in theater and opera, so she pondered for less than a second and replied, “Sure!”

The hairdresser explained to Gigi that she would have to cut off a certain length and take it in two long pigtails - her own hair would get pretty short. To which Gigi smiled and said, “Okay!”. So, her hair - which was almost down to her mid-back - was cut off at the nape of her neck. And without knowing who the recipient would be, without any qualifications, our beloved niece let another little girl - or maybe a couple of little girls - know that they are beloved, too.

CLICK - PROOF



Jesus asks: Which is easier, to say, “Your sins are forgiven”, or to say, “Stand up and take your mat and walk”?

Unfortunately, not a one of us can speak words that will turn cancerous cells into healthy ones. We cannot, with our words, hope to heal a broken body; none of us here will ever simply tell a paralyzed person to stand up and walk with any hope of results.

But we can - with ease - hand out pigtails.

THE BAPTISM OF JESUS  
SUNDAY, JANUARY 10, 2016  
MARK 1:9-13; MARK 2:1-22

7 of 8

Life is complicated, it is full of arduous, often unforeseen challenges. Life throws us curve after curve and it is easy to feel overwhelmed and insufficient to the rigors of even the most “normal” day. But like Jesus, we are - most of us in this room - fresh from our baptism, which is the grace of God poured out on us liberally and freely every moment of every day. Knowing to whom we belong and by whom we are loved, we, like the Christ we follow, can turn to the world’s hurt and utter words of forgiveness with abandon, we can hand-out pigtales of belonging and trust to everyone we meet.

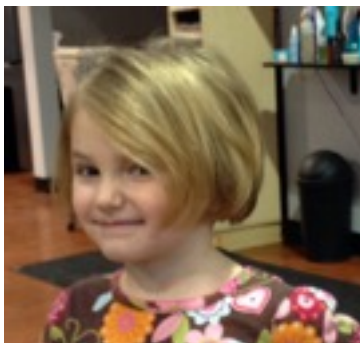
Gigi cannot heal another girl’s cancer, but she can offer - without knowing the recipient’s worthiness or need or station in life - a couple of pigtales of care and compassion; she can offer, with her gift of hair, the promise that the recipient is beloved; and maybe, hopefully, by offering her hair, Gigi can let another little girl know that right now, just as she is, in the middle of her illness, she is worthy of goodness and kindness. With a simple gesture of love, Gigi may be able to lift a sick child up from her mat so she can walk with more confidence and hope through the challenging journey that is cancer.

So, Christ comes to us with pigtales: to lift us out of paralyzing fears and to encourage us as we walk through the challenging journey of life. Christ comes to ground us, firmly, in the assurance that we are forgiven - no matter what, there is grace. Christ comes to help us know we belong: to God, in God’s family, here in this body of believers. We belong and we are beloved. We are beloved of God, as beloved as Jesus, just as we are, right now.

Words of forgiveness - spoken freely and liberally and without deserving or even asking - are words of grace, words that are to those who need them, gentle gifts with the power to break the paralysis of fear and lift up those trapped by doubt and shame, words that can welcome souls aching to know where they belong; words that can restore those who have been despised to a place where they know they are loved.

And...

CLICK - SASSY



...as Gigi is clearly not diminished by offering her pigtales to another, so, too is the miracle of love and the power of forgiveness, the great promise of baptism: these cannot be diminished by giving them away freely; in fact, they multiply in their returns. Knowing the faith and trust my director has in frees me from worry and opens me up to conversations in which my students

THE BAPTISM OF JESUS  
SUNDAY, JANUARY 10, 2016  
MARK 1:9-13; MARK 2:1-22

8 of 8

know that I have faith and trust in them. Grace and forgiveness freely offered instill peace and a sense of belonging, inspiring more grace and forgiveness to spill out, in broader and broader circles from their source: the Light of the World, the Light of Christ, which - by virtue of our baptism - resides within each and every one of us.

We can always be sufficient to the task of forgiveness, for we have received in such abundance that we can never run out!

The Light of Christ cannot be diminished by being shared. We've received our pigtales - in abundance - let's head out into the world to share them.

AMEN