

**Pentecost 11 B**

Deuteronomy 11:18-19  
Psalm 139:13-15  
2 Timothy 3:14-17  
Matthew 3:13-4:4

**Rev. Trish Schmermund**

Holy Spirit Lutheran Church, Edmonton  
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CLAY sending

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Grace and peace to you.

It's that time in the summer has come that we get to celebrate and send off our youth to the Canadian Lutheran Anglican Gathering (CLAY) in Thunder Bay! We get to send them with our prayer and our blessings after we have been encouraging and supporting them for the past couple of years. This congregation is very supportive of our youth – thank you for this. It is an ongoing commitment that we undertake to lift them up and help them learn and experience faith in today's world.

So I want to talk today about the foundational pieces that guide us. Sometimes we just sort of go through life without giving it a lot of thought. It's actually fairly important that we would do that for ourselves, because life gets in the way, things happen unexpectedly and we sometimes might just forget who we are. So, what are those foundational pieces of the Christian life? I'd like to touch on two this morning: scripture and baptism.

If we start with the readings from Deuteronomy and 2 Timothy we read that a foundational piece is simply scripture, the Holy Scriptures that have been taught, gifted and handed down for thousands of years – which we may at times take for granted. I know for myself I have to at times remind myself to read them; I might get to the end of the week and realize that I haven't even opened my Bible except to write a sermon! Sometimes I allow myself to become so distracted by other things going on, the many comings and goings around here, other aspects of ministry, household chores, summer activities and suddenly realize "my goodness I haven't even opened the Bible this week just to read and learn and absorb what it has to teach me." So, it's good to remind ourselves to do this. How many of you have said at one time or another "I should read my Bible more!" or maybe it's a challenge to even remember where you last left it! This is partly what this reading from Deuteronomy is talking about.

The writer of Deuteronomy lived in a time when most people couldn't read or write, so how do you get people to know what it says? The writer says it's like one has to write it, engrain it, tattoo it on to our hand, putting the word as a symbol on our forehead – then we will be reminded of the sacred word that is such an important part of life. In Timothy, we learn we ought to teach the stories of the Bible to our children, listen and learn together, talk about them where ever we

are whether at home, traveling or in the morning and on our bed at night. The Scriptures are not just something we hear or turn to on a Sunday mornings, they are not something we read only when we face challenges – they are to be weaved into every aspect of our lives. And in order to do that, in order to know the stories and how they can direct and help us, we have to know the stories to begin with. These stories teach us so much about who we are and whose we are. They teach us so much about everyday life and how we can live into the world; whether you lived in the time Deuteronomy was written or in this moment, scriptures are a foundational and irreplaceable part of the Christian life.

The second foundational piece is modeled Matthew by the story of Jesus' own baptism. Isn't this just a beautiful story? I just love this image I found via good old Google of Jesus' baptism. It's not the typical "glorious" image of Jesus coming up out of the water with a heavenly light and a dove descending upon him, no, it's humble, as he quietly submits to the hand of John who was reluctant to baptized him in the first place!

John was reluctant – perhaps because he couldn't quite figure out why Jesus needed baptism. He would have known, growing up as a man of faith, knowing the scriptures, knowing the prophet's stories, that the Son of God, when he came, would be perfect. Baptism however, was a sign of repentance, necessary for *imperfect* people, not God's Son! Jesus didn't need baptism, but *chose* it. Perhaps, that he might have this foundational and grounding piece in his own life as he undertook all that was to come.

Baptism is a powerful symbol of inclusion; through the summer our font has been right at the entrance to the Sanctuary as a reminder of God's welcome as soon as you arrive! Think about this, when Jesus is baptized, what name is he given? In this version it's, "My Own Beloved." God names him and claims him in a way that the world never does.

We hear all kinds of messages that readily name our failures and shortcomings. As a woman, I hear all the time that I ought to be 5' 11", 110 lbs and have flawless skin, long smooth locks of golden hair. (I don't have any of those attributes.) Our young people today know "bullying" as an everyday occurrence, and feel unprecedented pressure to measure up and fit in – we know it's different because of reports of increasing mental health reports, suicide and more. We know there are many other names that the world is quick to hand out: stupid, ugly unsuccessful, unlovable, too short/ tall/skinny/ gay/straight/confused/lazy – it goes on and on. But this is where this foundational piece of Jesus' own baptism becomes so important. He has a new name, My Beloved. That means when difficulty comes, when he is questioned about his identity, when he is challenged about being the Son of God, when he is confronted for healing, teaching, forgiving and loving people Jesus is able to

remind himself of being claimed, of that moment of his baptism and say, "No, those things people say are not true, because who I am is what God said I am, My Beloved." Even at the darkest moment, that moment of baptism, of being safe in God's hands comes back to him when he quotes Psalm 22 on the cross "my God, my God, why have you forsaken me..." which if we read in its entirety we would understand that Jesus clearly understood that he was safe in God's hands.

Likewise, for us, when we encounter the world and all of those unloving messages that we hear, we are reminded by this loving water, "no, I belong to God. I am beautifully, fearfully and wonderfully made, I am a child of God."

Trouble comes in this world. It doesn't matter if you are 100 or 10, if you are here or heading to Thunder Bay. Trouble comes and when it does, we as God's people can cling to these foundational pieces that have been gifted to us. They become for us lasting bread for the journey.

Yes, we are on a journey. Here's the thing, even in Jesus' own baptism, this really interesting thing happens. When he is baptized he is not set aside as some perfect model, closed off in the Temple or Synagogue, he is not sequestered away, but thrust into the world. It's even the Spirit that propels him out! He cannot stay in some false state of perfection or isolation. He cannot stay where it's "safe." And so, Jesus goes out into the world where there are blind people, leprous people, powerful people, people who want to kill him and he goes out because the whole point of faith is to live it. Paul says we are in the world but not of the world, we are not to be changed by everything around us, but are to be an agent of change. The only way we can do that is by remembering our identity, who we are.

Imagine keeping a child at home after baptism, they are washed clean, forgiven, had a nice party – and then we never let them out again so that nothing happens! That's not living, we know that. The best thing that we can do is to provide the firm foundation for them to launch from and then set them free, trusting that God is still in their lives, and God is. God will never let them go, God has never let any of us go.

Speaking of launching, to our CLAY youth (NAMES) – as you head to Thunder Bay, go and have fun and remember who you are! To all of us, be reminded to be in the world yet, not of it. Where ever you find yourself go and learn, go and experience, go and worship, dance and yell to the loud and wonderful music, and remember you will always have a place of belonging.

Amen.