

Getting Started
Luke 3:15-17, 21-22
Acts 8:14-17

Getting started is a very difficult task to accomplish. Some of us have a difficult time getting started in the morning. It seems like it takes a long time to get cranked up and on our way. When I was a pastor in Kansas and Missouri I would walk into my study and see how much work was stacked on my desk, I wanted to turn around and walk away. The hardest thing to do was to sit down and get started. In all of our families there are always projects that need to get started, but we put off getting started and the result is that the project will never get finished until we get started. Beginnings are important, aren't they? And yet getting started is sometimes a difficult thing to do.

That may be true of our Christian life also. When we take a serious look at the challenge of living as the people of God we may feel overwhelmed. The challenge is great, isn't it? Just think about our task as the people of God. Isaiah tells us we are to work to bring about justice to the nations. But how do we do that? How do we bring justice to the nations in the middle east, Africa and other places? How do we even bring forth justice to our own nation? When we think of such a challenge we may feel overwhelmed and wonder how to get started.

What is true of the global dimension of the challenge is true also locally. As a congregation we may face challenges in our own community:

We see many of our neighbors are unchurched. There are children who do not go to Sunday School. Some of our neighbors are homeless and some are hungry, some are cold. We do indeed face great challenges in our community, to say nothing about the declining of many congregations world-wide. And we may wonder how to get started.

And what about our lives as individual Christians? The challenge is to live as servants of God in our places of employment, in our homes, in our places of leisure, and in our congregation is very great. The challenge to praise God every day in word and deed, the challenge to witness to our faith day in and day out, the challenge to use our resources to advance the kingdom - these challenges are great indeed. We may wonder how to get started.

In the Book of Acts, Peter tells us how Jesus got started on his ministry. Peter first gave us a concise summary of the life of Jesus telling us that Jesus went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed. How did Jesus get started on his ministry? Peter tells us, “Beginning from Galilee **after the baptism** which John preached,” The beginning for Jesus was his baptism. That was the event which thrust him into his ministry.

And that is how it begins for us too. Our life as the people of God begins in baptism. In baptism God gets us started. God brings us to life. Peter says, “God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power.” The same thing happens to us in baptism. God anoints us with the Holy Spirit and with power. God’s Spirit comes to dwell within us.

And it is God's Spirit who empowers us to live as the people of God. It is God's Spirit who stimulates our faith and inspires us to follow Jesus. It is God's Spirit who prompts us to love God and to care for people in need, beginning with our families and our congregation and our neighbors, but extending beyond them to people around the globe. This all begins in baptism.

It doesn't matter whether we walk to the baptismal font or are carried. It doesn't matter whether we are baptized in a Lutheran Church or in a Methodist or Presbyterian Church. It doesn't matter whether we are baptized in a big cathedral or outdoors in a river. What is important is that we are baptized in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. That is to say, what is important is that **God** baptizes us. What is important is that God, through water and Word, makes his beginning in our lives and gets us started living as God's people.

So, we have already gotten started! We have already made a beginning - a very important beginning. It is, in fact, the most important beginning we have ever made. For it is the beginning God has made in our lives. The first step is behind us. And that is important for us to realize. But just as important is to remember that baptism is but the first step. It is not the last step. It is a step which leads to other steps. Each day we must take another step. Each day we must make a new beginning. And each day's new beginning is like the first beginning - it is a beginning which must be empowered by God's own Spirit.

That's what we need each day - fresh new power to face the challenges of the day! Each day we face new challenges. Today we are called to live in faith as people of God. Today we are called to do what is right and just. Today we are called to love and to work for the good of others. There are days - and today may be one of them - when some challenges seem awesome. We may shrink back from such challenges out of fear. We may fear we are not equal to the challenge. We may fear we will fail. We may fear our efforts will be of no use. Someone once said, "*The largest mountain we must move on the way to forgiveness is the fear that it will not work.*" And that is true of all the other challenges we face. We may be afraid. And such fears may paralyze us. They may keep us from getting started with the task at hand.

Did Jesus struggle with such fears? I would not be surprised if he did. I well suppose there were days when he became discouraged. I know there were days he became tired. No doubt what revived him at such times was the remembrance of his baptism, the remembrance of that voice which came from heaven and said, "You are my own dear Son; and I am pleased with you."

And it is precisely this kind of remembering that we must do. We need to remember our baptism. We don't need to remember all the details. It is not important that we remember what we wore or who was there or who administered the baptism. What is important, is to remember that we have been baptized!

We need to remember our baptism for such remembering releases new power in our lives. Each time we remember our baptism we are assured that God has made a new beginning in our lives. Each time we remember our baptism we receive new energy to face the challenges of living as the people of God. Those challenges are great. But not too great. Not if we get started. Remembering our baptism, remembering who we are and whose we are, remembering that we are God's chosen people gets us started and thrusts us into our various ministries.

The play, "*Miles to go before I sleep*," is a delightful story of an old man named Ben who was literally conned into being a foster grandparent for a girl named Robin, a youthful offender. Robin admits hating older people; Ben admits disliking teenagers. Their relationship has a tough time getting off the ground. With time, though, the relationship grows. One day Robin encounters a difficult time and runs away from the juvenile correctional facility. Ben goes after her. Weary with age after an all-night search, Ben winds up at the home of Robin's alcoholic mother. Asked why he bothers to look for her, Ben responds, "I think I can help her!" Hiding in another room, Robin joins her aged friend and together they head back for the juvenile correctional facility. On the way she says to Ben, "I've never had anyone come looking for me before."

That is what the Baptism of our Lord is all about. Someone - someone special has come looking for us because the Lord can help us. When we are baptized our Lord takes our hand and walks with us to face the challenges of the day. That's what we need to remember every single day.

We have some great challenges ahead of us in 2019, but if we remember that our Lord walks with us and gives us the power we need every day to face those challenges, then God will be with us, as he has always been with us, to witness to the love and grace, mercy and compassion of our Lord and Savior. Our Lord has made the start for us in our baptisms - let's go out and love people like he did! That's what God wants us to do! And if we do that our other challenges won't seem so hard.

Today Luke suggests that there should be evidence in our lives that we are alive in Christ. Is there evidence that the Spirit is alive in us?

When you get your annual report next week, read through it and discover the answer!!

Amen!