



A SERMON

by Rev. Marcella Auld Glass: January 11, 2026



TODAY WE ARE CELEBRATING THE BAPTISM OF THE LORD SUNDAY. And this day should be the highest holiest day in the life of the church. I get why people come on Christmas Eve with the candles and the carols, but baptism! Baptism is everything for us. This would be the high holy day, if they would just let me be in charge of everything.

At Jesus' baptism, God's voice rips the heavens apart. Mark's gospel says "And just as Jesus was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. ¹¹ And a voice came from heaven, 'You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.'"

The heavens weren't opened like a curtain that could be closed again. They were torn apart. The barrier between earth and heaven is destroyed at Jesus' baptism because the claim of belovedness is so important, it changes the established order of things.

And we believe that each time we celebrate a baptism, whether it is a baby we baptize or an adult, God's voice shreds the divide between earth and heaven to cry out our belovedness. We don't put conditions on baptism. We don't say to a baby, "we'll baptize you and take care of you, and God will love you, as long as you vote like us, or behave the way we tell you to behave." We acknowledge in baptism that we cannot put conditions on who God loves and cares for, and it turns out that is the whole world.

All of the barriers we put up to divide us from each other are demolished by God's voice crying out beloved. A person's immigration status, the color of their skin, their religion, the person they voted for, the person they love—none of those divisions are stronger than the voice of God calling out beloved.

We gather to worship this morning in a world that seems ever more divided. And I want to acknowledge that our division is not what is new. The fractures in our society because of racism and authoritarianism have been there all along, more hidden for some of us than for others because of our privilege. But now it is all out in the open, and sadly being celebrated by our president.

A woman trying to drive away from ICE officers was murdered in her car as she tried to comply. They didn't shoot the tires of her car to disable the vehicle. They shot her in the head and then refused to let a doctor nearby offer her care. This state sponsored, and defended, violence that killed Renee Nicole Good this week in Minneapolis has happened before. George Floyd. Sandra Bland. Breonna Taylor. The list could go on and on. We say their names because they matter to God. They matter to us.

And I'm angry. And I'm exhausted. And I suspect y'all are somewhere in there too. And that's good. We should be angry and exhausted when our own government tries to gaslight us into believing that we did not see what we saw. And we will need our anger to fuel the resistance to the ever-expanding authoritarian lawlessness we are seeing. One of my favorite prayers by Laura Jean Truman says:

Keep my anger from becoming meanness.
Keep my sorrow from collapsing into self-pity.
Keep my heart soft enough to keep breaking.
Keep my anger turned towards justice, not cruelty.
Remind me that all of this, every bit of it is for love.
Keep me fiercely kind.

I pray those words every day.

And if you're wondering what this political news has to do with faith, that's a question we get a lot online when people comment on our videos. So here is as clear an answer as I can give. Baptism.

The way we try to divide our lives into political over here and religious over there is a denial of baptism. It is asking us to pretend that God is only concerned with what happens in church. But being shot in the street after you drop your child off at school—that matters to God. Renee Nicole Good might have even been a Presbyterian at some point in her life. Her uncle is a Presbyterian minister. But it doesn't matter if she was a Lutheran, a Baptist, or a Catholic, a non-believer, or a member of another religion. She is God's beloved child and she matters to God.

Do you remember your baptism? I do not remember my baptism. I was 3 months old. But I remember it because Sunday School teachers told me the stories of Jesus. I remember it because my parents talked about how they had prayed for a baby and then God brought me to their family in adoption. I remember it because my childhood church took care of me, and fed me, and loved me.

Because I work on Sundays, I hadn't been to worship at my childhood church for many, many years. But when I walked in the building, the day before my mom's funeral in 2022, a woman who was there volunteering in the

library greeted me by name when I walked in, even though she hadn't seen me in person since the 1990s. That church took their baptismal vows seriously, and so I remember my baptism.

Today is the day when we reclaim our baptismal vows, whether we remember the day or not. Today we reclaim them for ourselves and we commit to honoring them for everyone else. If you haven't been baptized, and are interested in finding out more about it, send me an email this week and we can talk about it. Whether or not you've been baptized, God's voice is calling you beloved. Baptism is our response to that good news, not the reason it speaks.

Let us worship this day, with our sorrow and our anger, with our hope and our love. All of who we are is welcome in this place.

John 1:29-51

The next day he saw Jesus coming towards him and declared, 'Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! This is he of whom I said, "After me comes a man who ranks ahead of me because he was before me." I myself did not know him; but I came baptizing with water for this reason, that he might be revealed to Israel. 'And John testified, 'I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him. I myself did not know him, but the one who sent me to baptize with water said to me, "He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain is the one who baptizes with the Holy Spirit." And I myself have seen and have testified that this is the Son of God.'

The next day John again was standing with two of his disciples, and as he watched Jesus walk by, he exclaimed, 'Look, here is the Lamb of God! 'The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus. When Jesus turned and saw them following, he said to them, 'What are you looking for? '

They said to him, 'Rabbi '(which translated means Teacher), 'where are you staying? 'He said to them, 'Come and see. 'They came and saw where he was staying, and they remained with him that day. It was about four o'clock in the afternoon. One of the two who heard John speak and followed him was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. He first found his brother Simon and said to him, 'We have found the Messiah '(which is translated Anointed). He brought Simon to Jesus, who looked at him and said, 'You are Simon son of John. You are to be called Cephas '(which is translated Peter).

The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, 'Follow me. 'Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. Philip found Nathanael and said to him, 'We have found him about whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus son of Joseph from Nazareth. 'Nathanael said to him, 'Can anything good come out of Nazareth? 'Philip said to him, 'Come and see. 'When Jesus saw Nathanael coming towards him, he said of him, 'Here is truly an Israelite in whom there is no deceit! 'Nathanael asked him, 'Where did you come to know me? 'Jesus answered, 'I saw you under the fig tree before Philip called you. 'Nathanael replied, 'Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel! ' Jesus answered, 'Do you believe because I told you that I saw you under the fig tree? You will see greater things than these. ' And he said to him, 'Very truly, I tell you, you will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man.'

OUR TEXT FROM JOHN'S GOSPEL TODAY gives us another picture of how we are called together into community. It begins with John the Baptist's account of Jesus' baptism, which is closely connected to the calling of the disciples.

And we know about the disciples. They are not called because they have it all together or because they bring with them particular crime fighting skills. We know that they say and do the wrong things all the time. But they are better together than any of them are alone.

In this account, they recognize Jesus for who he is. *"Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!"* They proclaim his identity at the very beginning of his ministry, perhaps even calling him into his role and his better nature. And then they invite others to come and see and join them on the journey.

The community Jesus creates comes about because of *non-anxious invitation*. Inviting people to see Jesus is not a popularity contest or a numbers game where we measure victory by budgets, attendance, or other measures. John the Baptizer points Jesus out to two of his own disciples—"Look, here is the Lamb of God!"—and they immediately leave John to follow Jesus. John's testimony was worth something, it seems. John's testimony was also self-sacrificial. If all his disciples start following Jesus instead of following him, the membership of John's church is going to go down and how will he pay the bills, hire a youth director, etc., etc.?

Jesus' response to these new people following him is different than we might expect from some people today. He doesn't say, *"YES! I've got two more! I've got more disciples than anyone! I've stolen some of John's congregation and so my church will be the biggest church in Israel!"*

He doesn't ask them what they can do for him. *"Is one of you, by chance, a guitarist? I could use a praise band at the early service."*

He doesn't ask what their qualifications for ministry are.

He asks them, **"What are you looking for?"**

I don't think they have an answer for him. They just knew that if the Lamb of God showed up, they should follow him. And Jesus invites them to "come and see."

They didn't have to sign a contract or a non-compete clause. They were, we imagine, free to leave at any point, to "go and not see."

American Christians, people like us, have not been the best at non-anxious invitation in recent years. There is a strand of Christianity that wants to bring people into the fold so the people won't end up going to Hell. Or we act like if you don't see things exactly the same way we do, you're wrong. I suspect that's not most of us, but perhaps some of us have been on the other side of an *invitation* that felt like more of an *imperative*.

From what some of you have told me, I know there is also a reticence to invite people to come and see because we don't want to be a jerk. We don't want to be the people who make Christianity seem like such a joyless venture. And sadly, that means we end up keeping the Good News to ourselves.

God's community is invitational. I try to ask people who join the church how they found us. And occasionally, someone will mention someone by name as having invited them. Your invitations to other people, inviting them to come and see, are not inconsequential. *Who might need your invitation now, in this crazy mixed-up world we're in, to come and see a glimpse of grace in community?*

The invitation doesn't have an expiration date. We don't invite someone to join us at church and say, "*but this offer is only good for a month and then it expires. ACT NOW. Operators standing by.*"

Sometimes the invitation takes years to play out, so people might not even remember having been invited. The invitation might be something they heard, read, or saw at some point in the past, something you had done or said in the community, that stayed there in the back of their minds until the call to "come and see" Calvary was remembered. Or maybe the invitation happened in another town, or when you were a kid, and you didn't remember the invitation until you were sitting on the 22 Fillmore, looked out the window, and saw the church as the bus went by.

One of our new members in the fall class first visited Calvary in the late 90s to hear Dave Brubeck perform in the sanctuary. I am thankful he felt the invitation, as it worked in his life for 30 years to bring him here now. There is no expiration date to God's invitation. Because we are all in different places and moments of our journey. God's time is not our time.

Who invited you to "come and see"? Can you even remember? What made you want to be a part of a community that followed a Palestinian Jew who died 2,000 years ago and claimed to be the Son of God?

I noticed that in each of the responses to the invitation in this story in John's gospel, people noticed a different thing about Jesus. For John the Baptizer, Jesus was the Lamb of God. For Andrew, Jesus was the Messiah. Phillip followed a direct invitation from Jesus and then invited Nathanael because "we have found him about whom Moses in the law and the prophets wrote, Jesus son of Joseph from Nazareth." Nathanael followed Jesus because of what Jesus knew about Nathanael—that might be my favorite reason of all of them—the *notion that God knows exactly who I am, and wants me to follow anyway.*

Each of us would describe who Jesus is in different terms. This doesn't mean we're wrong for having different answers. It's worth noting that what brings us to faith may be different than what drew someone else. Each of the gospel writers, and the apostle Paul, describe Jesus in very different terms too. And while that may be uncomfortable for us, I think it is worth noting. The very nature of God become human is a difficult thing to get our minds around. It is okay when we see Jesus and understand something differently than someone else does. Which means we won't offer a class on exactly what to say to invite someone to "come and see" Jesus. What I like about these call stories in John's gospel is that each of the disciples are drawn by different things and are accepted as they are. Nathanael is invited, even as he makes fun of Jesus' hometown.

They even take snarky disciples to follow Jesus, which surely gives me hope.

Jesus took one look at Simon and said, "You are Simon, son of John. You are to be called Cephas (which is translated "Rocky"). He recognizes everything in Peter in a glance—his passion, his impetuous spirit, his deep heart—and he never tries to pretend Peter is anything other than that. The invitation to come and see is for our authentic selves.

Which means our invitation to others needs to come from our own authentic self too. Speaking of faith is never the time to pretend to be someone you're not. And it may not involve a lot of words.

Think about a time in your life when you, with all your quirks and particularities, were invited into relationship by someone's honest and authentic invitation.

I've had a few friendships over the years that come to mind. When I was in college, this amazing and brilliant young woman who clearly had it all together wanted to be my friend. At first, I kept looking behind me, wondering who she was really talking to. And then I realized it was me. Once I got to know her, I saw that my view of her perfection was coming from my insecurities and not from her. She was honest about herself and

invited me into her life with all of its complexities. And she helped me become more honest about my own imperfections and she stood by me, literally holding my hand through the most difficult days of my life.

There have also been invitations, either that I have offered or that have been offered to me, that haven't been accepted. And while that stings when it happens, it is a gift to say no to the wrong invitation so that you are available to say yes to the one that is meant for you.

A little later in John's gospel, Jesus offers a teaching about what we now understand to be communion. *"Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood have eternal life, and I will raise them up on the last day; for my flesh is true food and my blood is true drink. Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me, and I in them."*

On hearing that, some of his disciples say, **"What are you talking about? That's nuts. We're outta here."** And Jesus says, **"Cool. See ya. Bye."** *(That's a rough translation of the Greek).*

The invitation may not be for everyone, and that's okay. Not everyone wants to come and see. Some people may have been so hurt and injured by previous churches that they may never darken the door of a church again.

Our job description as disciples is to do the inviting. God's job description is the saving of the world. We will do our part and trust God will do theirs.

The invitation to come and see is less about building an argument for faith and convincing people that we have the right, and only, answer to the question. Our very lives are how we invite people to come and see—how are we living out our faith so people will want to join in community?

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In John's Gospel, Jesus' baptism happens offstage. We don't actually see it. This will be a theme in John's gospel—we are not eyewitnesses to the life of Jesus. We only know of Jesus through what other people tell us about him.

Which means we need to tell others about Jesus somehow too.

As we see the stories of Jesus and the disciples play out, it will show us what we already know from our own experience—community is messy and challenging and wonderful. Life giving and aggravating. And that's our invitation.

And the invitation matters. We are in a world that is fractured and isolated, where people have lost the thread of community and connection. Who might need an invitation out of their isolation? I know that, in these days, especially, I am thankful for the gift of this community in my life. Who else might need that gift and how much stronger would we be for their presence?

I'd like to leave you with a quote from a Roman Catholic Archbishop from Brazil, Dom Helder Camara. He said, **"When we are dreaming alone, it is only a dream. When we are dreaming with others, it is the beginning of reality."**

Friends, what reality are we being called to dream together? How will our lives respond to the invitation? Come and see!