

My friend Rodger Nishioka tells the story of Kyle. Rodger says that Kyle was nowhere to be found and he was missed. In the weeks following his baptism and confirmation on Pentecost Sunday, Kyle was noticeably missing from the church. Several other members of the confirmation class asked about Kyle as did his covenant partner.

Kyle and his family had come to the congregation when Kyle was in the 5th grade. They attended sporadically so his youth director Rodger, my friend, was a little surprised when his parents said that they wanted Kyle to attend the confirmation classes. Kyle and his parents came for the orientation meeting and agreed to the covenant to participate in two retreats, a mission activity, and attend the weekly meetings with his adult covenant partner.

Kyle was serious in attending and rarely missed a class. He quickly became a significant part of the group and developed some wonderful relationships with others in the group. Kyle had not previously been baptized so when he was confirmed on Pentecost Sunday he was also baptized. The whole day was described as a wonderful celebration.

Since Kyle disappeared from anything having to do with the church after his baptism his youth minister Rodger checked up on him. When Rodger asked his mother where Kyle and his family had been, Kyle's mother replied, "Oh, well, I guess I thought Kyle was all done. I mean he was baptized and confirmed and everything. Isn't he done?"

Many folks think like Kyle's family. Many folks think that baptism is a conclusion. Many folks think that profession of faith in Christ is an endpoint. Many folks think that the purpose of the Christian faith is to profess faith in Christ and that is all that there is. But as today's text makes very clear, baptism and profession of faith is not an ending point. Baptism and profession of faith is a marking for the beginning of ministry. Baptism is a commissioning into something bigger.

In this church, we baptize both babies and we baptize people after they make a public profession of faith. Each type of baptism is the same baptism. For an infant, the parents present their child for baptism. In presenting their child for baptism, they profess their Christian faith and they promise to teach that faith to their child. The church also professes to do the same for the child.

When someone who is a teenager or an adult is baptized, they make that profession of faith for themselves. They make their own public profession of what they believe and what they seek to do.

But whether we baptize an infant or a teenager or an adult, the claim at baptism is the same. At baptism, the person has a relationship affirmed. And that relationship is that they are called a son or daughter of God and that they are special. At baptism, they are called a son or daughter and they are commissioned. They are commissioned to serve God in their whole life. And many times this commitment to serve God is not easy.

Do you know what Matthew records right after the baptism of Jesus? The gospels of Luke and Mark record the same event after the baptism of Jesus. In Matthew, Mark, and Luke, the next event in Jesus' life after his baptism is he is led out into the wilderness where he is tempted by the devil. In other words, Jesus is thrown right into one of the most challenging events he will face as a person living on earth. He will fast for 40 days and be tempted with all kinds of temptations.

Baptism and confirmation and professing faith in Christ and joining a Christian Church like Allison Creek is not an ending. Are the Panthers just satisfied with reaching the playoffs? Do you hear fans today saying, "I don't really care if the Panther's win today. After all they reached the playoffs. That is all that really matters."

I know of no one saying that today. And no one should be saying that the point of baptism and professing faith in Christ is the final goal. Baptism and profession of faith in Christ is a commissioning. It is a commissioning to serve God and to seek to follow the ways of God in your life. Baptism is a start into something much bigger.

Baptism is important for another reason as well. At baptism, we are given a name. At baptism we are called son or daughter of God. Baptism is the marking of the most important relationship we have in the world. The relationship we have to God.

I don't know about you but I am called lots of names by lots of people. Some names I am called are nice. I am called the son of Sam and Betty McGregor. I am called the brother to Lib, Jean, Jimmy, and Johnny. I am called the husband of Kathryn. I am called the father to Rebecca, Mary Kathryn, and James. Some people call me pastor, some call me Mr. Sam, some call me Pastor Sam. Sometimes I am called nice names.

Some call me an idiot. Some call me hardheaded. Some call me names that I am not going to say publically from a pulpit. I'll say it privately but I am not going to say it in this setting.

You have lots of names as well. Some good. Some not so good. You have people who call you good and not so good names in their conversations with others or in their postings in social media. Although there are many here I feel pretty sure only have nice things said about them.

There is a quote from e.e. cummings that I recall frequently. Cummings said it is a challenge to "be yourself in a world which is trying everyday to make you like everyone else." At baptism you are given a name that is different than the name that others call you. At baptism you are given the name Son or Daughter of God. And that is a name that no name calling should ever take away.

It is true we may lose sight of the name that we are given at our baptism. We may start to believe those other names that people call us. If we are used to getting lots of accolades we may start to believe that we are better than others. If we are used to people calling us trashy names we may start to believe those names as well and to start to live the way others try to portray us.

But I invite you today to claim your baptismal name. The name that you are given by God. The name which is a relationship. The relationship of being claimed by God as Son or Daughter of God.

But don't just see that naming of a relationship as the end. See it as a beginning. Through your baptism you are called into service. Through your baptism you are called into growth. Through your baptism you are called to move forward and to not stay stagnant or to move backward.

Jesus was baptized and then was called to resist temptation and to model a new way of being for the world. Jesus was baptized and then faced a very difficult task. Jesus' life, though, was marked by faithful obedience to God and a trusting that God would provide what he needed.

Your calling through your baptism may be difficult as well. But like the model set before us by Christ, we are to trust in God to provide what we need and to sustain us through the journey of faith.

If you have never been baptized or had your children baptized, then I invite you to speak to me or to one of our elders here at ACPC. Baptism is not some magical experience in which you receive some type of fire insurance from hell and damnation. That is believed by some who want their child baptized who never set foot otherwise in a church.

No, rather than some type of insurance, baptism is a sign for us that we are claimed by God. Baptism is a call upon our lives to serve God and to serve God with meaning and conviction. Baptism is a beginning. AMEN.

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-Nishioka story from Feasting on the Word, Year A, Vol. 1, edited by Barbara Brown Taylor, p. 237-8.

-Text: Matthew 3:13-17

-Given: January 12, 2014 in Allison Creek Presbyterian (York, SC)