

# Sermon Notes: Why Be Christian?

## Week #1

### Introduction

This week we begin a new post-Christmas sermon series called “Why Be Christian?” Over the course of the next five weeks, we will explore the meaning of our faith and spirituality, particularly as Christians. This first week we begin at the beginning: with the opening verses of the Genesis creation story, and with the baptism of Jesus. These are essential beginnings to the stories of Christianity, and they offer us the opportunity to explore the beginnings of our own faith. In doing so, we can consider how to help others begin—or begin *again*—their own faith journey.

### Illustration Video

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u9cCcGIstCw>

A clip from the 2000 film *O Brother, Where Art Thou?* where Everett, Delmar, and Hogwallop experience something unexpected in the wilderness near a river.

### Video Discussion Questions

1. The three characters in this scene are... not people who exhibit the highest levels of integrity. Have you seen this film? What is the background of these characters? How has their past caused them to live in the world? Do you agree with them and/or with their choices? Do you understand their choices, even if you don't agree with them?
2. What distracts them from their conversation? Would you be distracted under similar circumstances? Why or why not?
3. Who are the people in white in this scene? Do you identify with them? Do you identify with someone else in the scene? What are the people in white doing? Why are they doing what they're doing?
4. Delmar suddenly takes action and rushes into the river to be baptized. Watch the part where he first comes up out of the water. What do you read in his expression? How does he say that he will be changed? Regardless of what you may know about the arc his character follows in the film, do you think he means what he says?
5. Does this scene remind you of any circumstance? Your own baptism or another? Are these pleasant memories? Share your thoughts with a study partner or family member and consider how this scene might invite further reflection.

### Genesis 1:1-5 (CEB)

<sup>1</sup> When God began to create the heavens and the earth— <sup>2</sup> the earth was without shape or form, it was dark over the deep sea, and God's wind swept over the waters— <sup>3</sup> God said, “Let there be light.” And so light

appeared. <sup>4</sup> God saw how good the light was. God separated the light from the darkness. <sup>5</sup> God named the light Day and the darkness Night.

There was evening and there was morning: the first day.

### **Mark 1:4-11 (CEB)**

<sup>4</sup> John the Baptist was in the wilderness calling for people to be baptized to show that they were changing their hearts and lives and wanted God to forgive their sins. <sup>5</sup> Everyone in Judea and all the people of Jerusalem went out to the Jordan River and were being baptized by John as they confessed their sins. <sup>6</sup> John wore clothes made of camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist. He ate locusts and wild honey. <sup>7</sup> He announced, "One stronger than I am is coming after me. I'm not even worthy to bend over and loosen the strap of his sandals. <sup>8</sup> I baptize you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."

<sup>9</sup> About that time, Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee, and John baptized him in the Jordan River. <sup>10</sup> While he was coming up out of the water, Jesus saw heaven splitting open and the Spirit, like a dove, coming down on him. <sup>11</sup> And there was a voice from heaven: "You are my Son, whom I dearly love; in you I find happiness."

### **Scripture Discussion Questions**

1. Do you remember your baptism? Were you baptized as an infant or an adult? Who baptized you? Who was present? Who was missing?
2. Why is water so significant in the sacrament of baptism?
3. We might consider that John the Baptist was someone who *knew*. Someone who had found what he was looking for, and therefore had a sense of what the community around the Jordan River were looking for. So John gave it to them with water and with words. They glimpsed it in the gathering of the multitudes. That was why they splashed into the river to be baptized by this man who lived in the wilderness eating locusts and wearing camel hair. He had something they wanted. He saw what they were looking for. Have you found what you were looking for? When did you realize that you had found it? Is there a time when you mistakenly thought you had found what you were looking for?
4. Was Jesus' baptism necessary if he did not need repentance? Is the biblical account of his baptism relevant for us today? Why?
5. Many theologians have suggested that Christians want certainty that God claimed us, that we are beloved children with whom God is well pleased. Do you have this certainty? If so, how did you gain this certainty?
6. Read the first sentences of item 3 above again. Like the description of John the Baptist, how could you lead people to a life of faith? How could you help others gain the certainty that they are beloved children of God?

## **Add'l Questions for Consideration**

1. What do you think John the Baptist's main task is in the Mark verses?
2. Does John the Baptist seem approachable based on his description in the Mark text? Why do you think so many people were eager to be baptized by him? (*Remember, this is BEFORE the Christian faith really emerges, so John is baptizing people who are mainly Jewish, and they remain Jewish.*)
3. How is God present in each of the two scriptures? What is God's response or action in each text? Why do you think that response is important for us today?
4. What does it mean to be baptized? What does a baptism look like in our church? What is special or unique about the way we do baptisms?
5. What do you think the difference is between a water baptism and baptism of the Holy Spirit? Why do you think John pointed that difference out?

## **Weekly Action**

This week we explore beginnings. Take time in prayer, and remember your baptism. If you were too young when you were baptized to have any memory, perhaps you've experienced a *Remembrance of Baptism*. If you have never been baptized or if you don't have any memory of being baptized, speak with Pastor Bob about doing this! We will have a service of baptism and/or baptism remembrance including reception of new members during this sermon series. Wherever you are on your faith journey, pray and be in conversation with God about whether or not you are drawn to be a part of this!

## **Prayer**

Holy God, Eternal Spirit, we thank you for baptizing us into one body in Jesus the Christ. Wash over us with your Spirit, that, like Jesus, we may serve you in serving humanity. Baptize us with the fire of your truth, through Jesus Christ. Amen.