

Text: Mark 1:1-8

Date: December 14,2020

Title: Putting On Christ - So What?

John the Baptist said, "I have baptized you with water' but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit." I have a two word question that I ask of every text upon which I preach. So what? So what does, "I have baptized you with water' but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit." mean for my life, for yours?

At a text study with area pastors I asked that question. So what? One of my pastoral colleagues reminded me that St. Paul says that when we were baptized we put on Christ. I knew that. That's why give the newly baptized a white garment and at funerals we cover the casket with a white funeral pall, symbolizing that in baptism we have put on Christ and are literally covered with Christ's righteousness. I asked, "What does it mean that we are covered with Christ's righteousness? Again one of my pastoral colleagues reminded me of what Luther says about baptism, that the old sinful self with all its evil deeds and desires is put to death so that he new self can raise to like with Christ." I knew that too! After all I had been teaching confirmation before some of them were even born.

But what does that mean, today, in my life? I think my friends were beginning to tire of my questioning. What difference does it make that today that over 70 years ago I was "baptized with the Holy Spirit?" My questioning was beginning to wear thin but the words didn't seem to have any relevance for my life today.

Then one of my sisters in Christ suggested that being baptized with the Holy Spirit, putting on Christ means living with Christ day by day, through the Holy Spirit Jesus becomes a real living presence on our lives. And before I could ask, "Yeh, but what does that mean?" she related an experience on Black Friday a few years ago, the day after Thanksgiving in a Toys-R Us store in Hackensack, New Jersey.

It was one of those 7:00 a.m. after Thanksgiving Sales with a limited number of Spider Man Web Plasters or Frog Tennis or Rapunzel Barbies or whatever the latest, hottest, hard to get toy was that year. Her sister

wanted one of them. So Pastor Lor and her sister were determined to get there early, before the crowds, get in, get out and then leisurely enjoy the rest of the day with no real agenda. It was a family tradition. On the day after Thanksgiving the women go shopping. I remember my wife, my mother and my sister-in-law did the same thing. It was a good plan. Get at Toys-R-Us by 6:30 a half an hour before the crowds. It was a good plan apparently because others thought so too. When they arrived at 6:30 a.m., they discovered at least 150 people had the same good plan. At 7:00 a.m. in front of Toys-R-Us in Hackensack, New Jersey, Pastor Lor and her sister were part of a growing throng of people, intent on getting one of those “what ever it was” that was in “limited supply.”

The people were making their lists and checking them twice. Checking their watches, peering through the locked doors to get any advance warning that the doors would soon be opened. Those who were with comrades were plotting their strategy once they got in the store. At least one of them had done some reconnaissance on Wednesday. He was heard to say, “You go to the third aisle about half way down. That’s where you’ll find the Spider Man Web Blaster. I checked it out on Wednesday. I’ll go to the third aisle and grab the Frog Tennis. Whoever gets there first head for the back of the store where the Barbies are and then advance to the checkout.” Talk about planning.

The doors opened right on time and the people began to funnel into the store. Pastor Lor said the tension really high. She could feel it in her stomach. There were no rude elbows or shoulders. There was no tackling or blocking. People seemed polite enough but each was focused on their mission oblivious to the others around them. She said some of them were on cell phones. “You found it at K-Mart for how much. Get it. No! Get three of them.”

She said it was absolutely insane. She didn’t even have anything to get in the store and yet she was feeling the stress, the tension, the anxiety the pressure that was all around her. She wasn’t prepared for the 7:00 a.m. Toys-R-Us onslaught. Even though the Black Friday shopping foray was an annual affair, a family tradition all the sisters enjoyed, Pastor Lor was finished for the day. She was about to tell her sister, “I’ve had enough. Forget tradition. Forget the leisurely lunch together. I want to go home” and it was only 7:15. Partly out of exasperation, partly out of frustration, partly out of desperation,

she breathed as short prayer, "Lord, help me." She said she called upon the Spirit of God to calm her down." She continued.

It was amazing. "I was shocked in the huge difference that prayer of exasperation and frustration made." Those were her words. Right there in the midst of all that lunacy, that madness, that insanity, she felt calm. She felt peace. She was composed, collected and quieted. Right there in the middle of all that craziness she experienced the presence of God, the presence of the Holy Spirit. You see, she had been baptized with the Holy Spirit many years before and right there in Toys-R-Us in Hackensack, New Jersey the Spirit of Jesus was with her.

Always the cynic, I asked, "Was there a bright light? Did you hear angelic choirs? Did the crowds part like Moses before the Red Sea? Did all those "limited items" fall in your cart? Was there a long dark tunnel with a brightly lighted unoccupied cashier at the end? She smiled. "No, just a calmness that enable me to enjoy the rest of the day with my sisters." She called upon the Holy Spirit that had been given her at baptism and that Spirit enabled her to deal with all that was going on around her.

Now I will be the first to admit that in a day when more people in the US died in one day from Covid than Japanese people died all last year, in a day when responsible, trusted, dully appointed and trained election officials are getting death threats, in a day when the 200 year old tradition of the peaceful transition of power in our country is threatened, in such a day the feeling of peace and calm in a crazy Toys-R-Us seems pretty trivial. And it is.

But then I ask you, is Christ only present in the high drama of our lives? I think not. I think that is what Advent is all about - the coming of Jesus and his Holy Spirit right where we are. Whether it is in Hackensack, New Jersey, the grocery store aisle, the polling place or at quarantined at home awaiting a Covid 19 test result. That's what it means to be baptized with the Holy Spirit - to have the presence of God in our lives right now.

Yet too often we fail to recognize it or to call upon the Spirit of Jesus . Too often we fail to claim the promise given us at baptism when we put on Christ. Too often we fail to recognize the Spirit at work in our lives working the small miracles of life. Advent calls us to open our eyes to the presence

of God in places like Toys-R-Us, in your classroom, which today may be in your home, in your workplace, which also may be in your home. Recognize God at work in your every day life. Go now into the world filled with trivial, mundane Toys-R-Us moments and know our God is there.