



Baptism of Our Lord/1st Sunday after Epiphany
January 9, 2011
“The Ultimate Job Description”

Prayer: Bless this word proclaimed, and we who hear it, O Lord, that we too may hear Your voice and proclaim your glory. Amen.

While visiting with our families between Christmas and New Year’s, several conversations occurred around searching for a new job. In one conversation with my sister, it was her New Year’s resolution for this new year. In another conversation, our daughter was considering a different field than her current field of interest.

Between the conversations with family members, our texts for this week, and the reality of thanking outgoing council members for their work, welcoming new council members, and installing our new organist/choir director, led me to a lot of thinking about job descriptions. In thinking, I began to wonder about what the “ideal” job description would look like.

Perhaps you have also thought about your own version of the “ideal” job description, and what it would look like. If you have, my hunch is that it probably would include the following: fantastic co-workers, great pay, outstanding benefits, incredible hours, no deadlines, on-going opportunities to learn new things. . . the list could go on.

Job descriptions are unique pieces of paper. On one hand, they spell out particular tasks – and expectations for a position. On the other hand, job descriptions can also create false assumptions and expectations – whether for the person seeking employment or the place that is hiring. For example, during the search for a new organist/choir director – we thought we had a clear expectation that the person we were looking for would know how to read music. Imagine the surprise of the committee to meet a candidate who played by ear – and did not read music at all! The reality of someone playing by ear was a learning experience for all on the committee.

In some ways, job descriptions are promises about what will be done in the position. They eventually turn into a contract between two or more people.

If we looked closer, we would see that our reading from Isaiah has a job description in it. It is a job description for the Servant --God’s servant Israel – to lead others to God. Elements of this job description include, but not limited to the following: the servant will not cry or lift up his voice. Nor will he break a bruised reed, or extinguish a dimly lit wick. By this, the servant will take care of those who cannot care for themselves. The servant will faithfully bring forth justice. The servant will be a covenant to the people, and a light to the nations. The servant will open the eyes that are blind and bring out the prisoners from the dungeon. There is a lot to be done within this job description – so much, that it could seem overwhelming and daunting! Who among us would want to even apply for a position we knew from the beginning would be difficult to accomplish?

Not many of us would want to apply for a position that from the beginning had incredible expectations. However, the job description spelled out in Isaiah is fulfilled in Jesus. Jesus comes to John to be baptized. Jesus is acting on a decision that he has already made to fulfill the job description of the servant. Jesus knows there is much between the lines that needs to be accomplished in this description as well. John recognizes Jesus and why Jesus is coming to him – to the point John tries to talk Jesus out of being baptized. Yet Jesus indicates to John that the time to do the revealed will of God is now – not after reviewing the job description, not after prayerfully thinking about it, not after talking it over with others.

Today, on this First Sunday after Epiphany, as we remember the Baptism of Our Lord, we remember also our own baptisms. We remember them not from the perspective that because Jesus was baptized, so also should we be baptized. Instead, we remember our baptism from the perspective that Christian baptism is a matter of obedience and receiving the Holy Spirit.

Jesus' baptism was done in obedience. In that obedience, Jesus received the Holy Spirit. The events of the heavens opening, a voice coming from heaven, and the Holy Spirit being given to Jesus were unique events – events that revealed God still working in a world that had thought God no longer existed. Matthew is reminding his hearers – and us – that the revealing of God can and does still happen in our lives today!

Within that obedience, Jesus was revealed as being God's Son, God's beloved. In the same way, the waters of our baptism claim us – and mark us – as Children of God. Being a child of God means living life in a different way. It means saying yes to God, and saying no to the things – or people – even ourselves that lead us away from God.

In the baptismal covenant that God has made with us, we promised, or it was promised for us:

- to live among God's faithful people,
- to hear his Word, and share in his supper,
- to proclaim the good news of God in Christ through word and deed,
- to serve all people, following the example of our Lord Jesus,
- and to strive for justice and peace in all the earth.

We also promise to renounce all the forces of evil, the devil, and all his empty promises.
Now if that is not a loaded job description, I am not sure what is!

The promises we make in the waters of our baptism sound incredibly simple. The reality is, these promises are not as simple as they appear to be. Consider – living among God's faithful people means doing exactly that – even when it is with people we disagree with or like the least. To proclaim the good news of God in Christ through word and deed can mean praying with a complete stranger or helping someone unexpectedly. Renouncing all the forces of evil, the devil, and all his empty promises – means not giving in to those things we do. Those things we know we should not do, yet the things we do anyway.

YET – this is indeed what baptism demands of us – the daily dying of the old self, and the daily rising of the new self. We are called, invited, and challenged -- to take on a new life of following Christ, living in Christ's light and Christ's way. It is a life that challenges us to live a way that is different from the way society lives. It is a life that demands we say yes to God's call within our lives, and no to our own voices, or the people we love.

The waters of our baptism can leave us at times feeling overwhelmed; as though we are in over our heads. There are days where it can be easier *not* to renounce the forces of evil than it can be to renounce them.

The good news is that in the waters of our baptism, in the midst of feeling overwhelmed, we stand on dry, solid ground. This ground is the cross of Christ under our feet – the very same cross of Christ we hold onto when life becomes uncertain, or when we feel as though life is overwhelming.

In a few minutes, we will recognize our outgoing council members, welcome new council members, and install our new organist/choir director. All of these positions carry with them weighty job descriptions and responsibilities. With these job descriptions and responsibilities come expectations – some low, some high, some somewhere in between. There may be times where we as a congregation fail to live up to expectations we have of each other. There may be times where expectations of the music director on us may not be what we want to sing or hear – or vice versa. There may be times where we wonder what we have gotten ourselves into.

In the midst of these expectations, in the midst of reality, comes the other good news. This reality is that, in the waters of our baptism, we too hear God's words of pleasure and delight for each and every one of us: "You are my beloved, with whom I am well pleased."

May God who is gracious and merciful, continue to be bold in His love for us as beloved children, and fellow workers in the Kingdom of God. Amen.