

**I. Introduction:** Time spent yesterday playing w/ a 3-year-old ... noticed his sense of wonder & exploration

**A. When we were very young children, exploring the world around us and our own bodies was a natural part of our early development**

1. We ran our hands through the dirt, examined the color and texture of the carpet, looked closely at the veins in our hands, and tried to wiggle just one toe but not the others.
2. Inevitably our gaze turned to our own middle, and to this strange opening in our belly that nothing came out of – yes I'm talking about discovering our belly buttons

**B. Like all exploratory discoveries in childhood, we eventually lost interest in our navel and kind of forgot about until ...**

1. Sometime in the bathtub or the swimming pool or playing outside when we saw that someone else's navel looked different!
2. And that inevitably led to one of the quintessential questions of childhood: *"Are you an innie or an outie?"*
3. Now to sophisticated adults, this image may seem crude for a Sunday morning, but in the innocence of childhood questioning, it's not crude or inappropriate
4. Bear with me, please, because I find in the examining of our very own navels, an intriguing metaphor for our biblical passages today:

**II. I see some parallels between belly buttons and baptism ...**  
(and the baptism of Jesus is the focus of our story in Gospel of Matthew)

**A. What is our navel? The navel is proof of a cord that's been cut ...**

1. For 9 months, each of us in our mother's womb depended on that umbilical cord for our very life ... but when that cord was cut, we were set loose, on our own as a totally separate organism
2. In a certain way, baptism too is proof of a cord that's been cut
  - a) In baptism, we step out into our own faith & make our own faith commitments
  - b) In baptism, we are no longer tied to old spiritual umbilical cords, such as our parents' faith ... or our old selfish belief systems before we took Jesus as Lord and Savior

- c) Baptism demonstrates the new life and freedom we have on our own in Christ

## **B. The navel is a visible bodily mark left from a major physical event in our past**

1. It constantly reminds us of where we came from, lest we start to believe in "the stork theory" of procreation!

2. Even though in our society you can't externally look at someone and always know if they were baptized or not, baptism is nonetheless a marking event for us as Christians

- a) Some of you may recall that when we baptize persons at Waterford, we declare the following words:

*(1) In your baptism, you are sealed with the Holy Spirit and marked as Christ's own forever*

*(2) And then with a wet hand, one of us pastors makes the sign of the cross on the forehead of the baptized person*

- b) So I wonder, "What kind of mark is left on us by baptism?"

*(1) Is there some kind of visible sign in our lives now that we were once baptized and are now born again?*

*(2) Do we bear some notable indication of where we came from, spiritually?*

## **III. If Jesus himself was baptized and then John kept inviting others to that action, let's examine a little closer baptism itself**

### **A. Baptism means many things to many different people**

1. For some it symbolizes the life-changing experience they had before baptism, in turning their lives over to Jesus Christ

2. And for some, the baptism itself is a life-changing experience

3. But unfortunately today, I sometimes hear people talk about their baptism exclusively in terms I would call "internal"

- a) Perhaps ... baptism means the proof of their own salvation

b) Or baptism is their way to join the church as a full member ... to acquire a sense of having "arrived" in the community

c) And for some, baptism has been the way to finally take the Lord's Supper with the adults

d) In our Mennonite tradition, there is some truth in those meanings of baptism, but those meanings are inadequate

4. Physically, whether you're an “innie” or an “outie” makes no difference regarding your worth or potential as a person
5. But it does make a difference whether your baptism demonstrates an inward focus or an outward focus for your faith

## **B. We need a balanced understanding of baptism**

1. On the one hand, it most definitely IS an inward thing:
  - a) It is a sign of our own personal commitment to Jesus Christ, and also a sign of our new standing with the church
  - b) Sometimes in my 21 years of pastoring, I have repeated an old Protestant cliché about baptism as “an outward sign of an inner reality”
2. But I believe that is not adequate either. Baptism is also an outward thing:
  - a) It is not merely our rite of Christian initiation, or our ticket to receive communion
  - b) Baptism shows our willingness to enter into a life of Christian service and ministry in the world
3. From over a hundred years ago, there's a quote I like from the Scottish evangelist and teacher Oswald Chambers, author of the well-known devotional book My Utmost for His Highest

*It is easy to turn our religious life into a cathedral for beautiful memories, but there are feet to be washed, hard flints to be walked over, people to be fed. Very few of us go there, but that is the way the Son of God went.*

## **C. To understand better this balance, we look to the example of baptism for Jesus himself**

1. Matthew chap. 3 tells us the events surrounding His baptism
2. But to see the significance of His own baptism, look at Matthew 4, the very next chapter, for what Jesus did soon after that baptism
  - a) After His temptations in the wilderness, from verse 17 onward in chapter 4, we see that Jesus preaches repentance & calls His first disciples to follow Him
  - b) Then we see Jesus traveling around Galilee actively teaching, preaching good news & healing people
  - c) The baptism of Jesus wasn't something He did to gain favor with His cousin John – after all John was reluctant to baptize Him
  - d) Baptism for Jesus was not a rite of initiation so He could comfortably settle back into a quiet carpenter's life in his hometown

3. Rather it was a beginning point for Jesus: It propelled Him into an active outward ministry of bringing in the kingdom of God

4. So whenever we read of the baptism of Jesus, it is also good to ask, ***“What is the call for us, who were baptized in His name?”***

#### IV. This is where we link back to our text from Isaiah 42

##### A. One interesting aspect of the story of Jesus’ baptism comes in these words from Matt. 3:17 (read)

1. This has strong echoes of the words we heard in first part of Isaiah 42:1 – it sounds quite similar

2. To the ears of the writer Matthew’s Jewish readers, it also had a familiar ring ... they would have recognized it. Why is that important to understand?

a) In the ancient world, recalling one verse from a text led the people to recall the whole text

b) They recognized this echo of Isaiah 42:1 and they knew what Isaiah 42 was about

##### B. And what was the message of the Isaiah 42 text? Let’s examine that. Turn with me in your Bibles to Isa. 42

Isaiah 42:1-4 New International Version (NIV)

42 “Here is my servant, whom I uphold,  
my chosen one in whom I delight;  
I will put my Spirit on him,  
and he will bring **justice** to the nations.  
2 He will not shout or cry out,  
or raise his voice in the streets.  
3 A bruised reed he will not break,  
and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out.  
In faithfulness he will bring forth **justice**;  
4 he will not falter or be discouraged  
till he establishes **justice** on earth.  
In his teaching the islands will put their hope.”

1. In the first 4 verses, take note of a significant repeated word: the word “justice” appears 3 times in those 4 verses

a) The prophet here describes God’s chosen servant (who is pleasing to

God & anointed by God's Spirit)

b) Bringing forth justice is this Servant's task ... that's what he's charged with doing

2. And "Who is the Servant?" That's a question Bible scholars have been debating for centuries

a) Jews in the time of Isaiah, as well as many scholars since then, have understood this Servant to be the people of Israel

b) But imagine Matthew's New Testament readers being told about Jesus' baptism, and then immediately there's a heavenly voice speaking words like Isa. 42:1, where God commends the Servant who brings justice

c) The Gospel writer Matthew is leading his readers to see Jesus Christ as the fulfillment of the Servant Song in Isa. 42

3. Now, that might be ... interesting to you, but I wouldn't blame you for wondering "So what?" After all, those Scripture events happened about 2000 years ago and 2600 years ago

## **V. Well, I believe this Isaiah passage is speaking about more than just the people of Israel & Jesus Christ**

**A. The "Servant" here does describe Jesus AND Israel itself, but it shouldn't be limited to mean just 1 person or group, or even period of time.**

1. The "Servant" is a description of who we are also to become:

2. It is our task, by the power of the Holy Spirit upon us, to work to bring forth justice on earth. HOW?

3. Using words relevant to Isaiah's time, listen again to the first few verses describing how we as the "Servant", will bring forth justice (42:2-4)

a) It will not be thru war, domination, or by oppressing vulnerable people

b) It will not be by drawing loud attention to ourselves as Saviors and Problem Solvers

c) But it will be by silently enduring suffering, by using the power of gentle firmness & righteous truth ... with Jesus the ultimate Servant as our model [blank PPT]

**B. And so let's return to the question of our calling: **specifically, how might we be God's servants today, working for justice?****

1. By noticing and supporting overlooked people

- a) maybe the picked on schoolkids;
- b) or colleagues at work who avoid the social outings because they can't afford the expenses;
- c) or immigrant neighbors not accessing local resources available to them
- d) Or someone at church who is withdrawing because of hearing loss

## 2. Contributing to justice advocacy causes

- a) Mennonite Central Committee ... Center for Healing & Hope ... Mennonite Economic Development Associates ... National Immigrant Justice Center ...
- b) and dozens more you may have gotten funding appeals from last month

## 3. By our own spending habits:

- a) buying more locally grown and locally produced products;
- b) or items known to support fair trade and job creation for the neediest

## 4. By serving others in many little ways every day, rather than just in 1 big splash

*The famous preacher Dr. Fred Craddock once told a gathering of ministers:*

“To give my life for Christ appears glorious. To pour myself out for others ... to pay the ultimate price of martyrdom – I’ll do it. I’m ready, Lord, to go out in a blaze of glory.

We think giving our all to the Lord is like taking a \$1000 bill and laying it on the table – ‘Here’s my life, Lord. I’m giving it all.’

“But the reality for most of us is that he sends us to the bank and has us cash in the \$1000 for quarters. We go through life putting out 25 cents here and 50 cents there.

- Listening to the neighbor’s kid’s troubles instead of saying, ‘Get lost!’
- Going to a committee meeting.
- Giving a cup of water to a shaky old man in a nursing home.”

*In other words, I would add, the way we live out our baptisms is by living our Christian lives through little acts of love over the long haul.*

## VI. (Application)

### **A. As we continue entering into 2020, let us reflect on our own baptisms in light of Jesus’ baptism**

1. We weren’t just baptized to give proof of our own salvation, nor just to “join the club”

2. We were baptized also to be Servants of God, who help bring forth justice ...

3. The Center for Action and Contemplation (started by Fr. Richard Rohr in New Mexico) has been a source of Xian thought and energy for integrating both the "innie" and "outie" parts of our faith

a) This week their weekly emailed devotional thoughts kicked off 2020 by calling us to a life of both action and contemplation, an outward and an inward spirituality

b) Richard Rohr wrote, *"We need both compassionate action and contemplative practice for the spiritual journey."*

**B. One of the authors I admired most in college and seminary was Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the German pastor & theologian who was executed in a WW2 Nazi prison**

1. Bonhoeffer described well this linkage between the quiet inner side of Christian faith, and the active outer side that seeks justice:

2. Seeing the German church in WW2 turning a blind eye to Nazi atrocities, he wrote, *"Only those who cry out for the Jews may also sing Gregorian chant."*

a) Now, I know that Gregorian chant went out of style in most churches LONG ago, but contemporary translations of that might sound like this:

b) *Only those who cry out for immigrant children dying in detention in our country may also sing 'It is well with my soul' "* OR maybe ...

c) *Only those who cry out for all the aborted babies in our country may also sing 'This is amazing grace' "*

**VII. Conclusion:** In a word, we are baptized to be "outies" & not only "innies"

**A. We are baptized not only to witness to what Jesus has done for our souls, but also to make a difference in the world ... to do our part to contribute toward justice through our life of service**

***B. Are you more of a baptized 'innie' or an 'outie'?***

**C. May God grace us spiritually to be both ...**