

I really like Luke's gospel. He is a physician and his attention to detail helps us truly understand the facts of the events he reports. Each author of the gospel has an agenda in writing. Matthew was written to prove to the doubting or seeking Jews that Jesus was, indeed, the promised Messiah. Therefore, he writes using many quotes of the Jewish O.T. scriptures and their prophets to emphasize his fulfillment of many of the promises found there. Mark, on the other hand, is a down and dirty writer. He is young and definitely a bottom line guy. So he writes in a very hurried style using the word immediately over and over again. He gives us the shortest and most succinct account of Jesus' story. John is writing to help his readers to believe that Jesus is actually God from the beginning of his book stating that Jesus was the word and present at the creation through the "I am" statements equating himself to God and many demonstrations that Jesus was the God of the Sabbath as well as able to perform untold miracles. Luke, on the other hand, is writing to Theophilus and his purpose was to report accurately "everything Jesus began to do and teach until the day he was taken up to heaven" (Acts 1:1) So we find in Luke the most detailed account of the Baptism of the Lord which we celebrate today in our Liturgical Calendar.

While studying Luke's passage this week I came upon a detail that I had never seen before, or at least I had overlooked it. I think most of us probably do miss it because of all the paintings we have that shows Jesus' baptism and include the descending of the dove onto Jesus while still standing in the water before John. Our impetuous Mark reports it this way and Matthew, whose writing is dependent on the Gospel of Mark also repeats it as depicted by Mark and the artists. This week, however, I noticed that that, according to our detail-oriented author it was not at Jesus' baptism where the dove came down upon Jesus. According to Luke, this happened in a subsequent time of prayer following his baptism... "Now when all the people were baptized, and when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, the heave was opened and the Holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form like a dove." Before the Spirit is given, Jesus waits in Prayer. Also in Acts, Luke shows us the church in prayer as they wait for the promised Holy Spirit. You recall that after Jesus ascended we are all told they returned to the upstairs room of the house where they were staying (1:13) and verse 14 tells us they all met together and were constantly united in prayer. By this time they had been baptized. They had received the breath of life from Jesus as he breathed on them, as depicted in John's gospel. But yet they waited for the Holy Spirit to come upon them and they waited in prayer.

In today's Acts passage the apostles had heard that the Samaritans believed in the gospel message. Peter and John go down to them, find them, determine that they were believers and in fact, had been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus but yet, they had not received the Holy Spirit. Then Peter and John laid hands on them and prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit and they did.

So we see what is begun in baptism is only the initiation. Our liturgy promised that it is the beginning of the initiation into the community of God. But it is the living out of the baptism through the practice of prayer by which one receives the Holy Spirit. Just as Jesus was empowered for and guided in his ministry through prayer, so too were his followers.

At Baptism we also receive the Holy Spirit which empowers us to say Jesus is Lord but there is so much more. Confessing Jesus is Lord is not all that the Holy Spirit had in store for Jesus followers either then or now. As they grew in their knowledge and practice of his teachings they began to receive more power to perform the acts that we see recorded throughout the rest of Acts and the New Testament. As they grew as disciples and in their commitment to Jesus Christ the Holy Spirit entrusted spiritual gifts to them. And the Holy Spirit will do the same for us.

I thought I would bring in a little visual to help us grasp what it is that we can learn from Luke today. I brought these three cell phones to help demonstrate our relationship to God and our work as a disciple of Christ.. Some of you may have owned or still own some of them.

Pretty much this one and the ones that came before this only allowed us access to others via telephoning. This was a major step forward. Even getting these cell phones in such a portable little package. I remember when I worked at capital in Tallahassee Fl. All the men and women would be carrying around these shoe box sized telephone devices. They were cumbersome but they were portable and no one working in the capital left home without one. It wasn't too long after that that they became more manageable in size. But no matter what the size, they still had only one purpose ... to connect us to each other via phone.

Baptism reminds me of that system. We bring our infants into the church and have them baptized. Many times we have not seen the parents for years before baptism. For these one-time-only families it is as if they go into Radio Shack and purchase a prepaid phone for 200 minutes. True, their child is connected in baptism to the church community like the prepaid connects to all the phones throughout the country. I call this Baptism: The Basic Plan.

The baby is initiated into the community but then the parents leave the church never to come back and so what good does it do them to be part of the family of God if they never access that connection.

Then there are parents and adults who are baptized and do attend church on a regular basis. They come for various reasons but their interest is in only attending the church on Sunday morning. They are like those who own this type of phone and use it sparingly. The phone has one function. To connect them to the folks they know when they are away from their landline. They come to church and leave their normal way of life at home for the 2 hours it takes to do the Sunday morning thing. They do not get involved in the life of the church or in the growth of their faith. They may be there for good reason – to do their God-shaped obligation. But they are not there to get more of God. They enjoy the music, the fellowship and they endure the sermon. Once in an while they are actually moved or touched by what is going on but usually they are not as they are focused on the life they left behind for this time and they are busy thinking about what they will be doing with the rest of their day, or they lean back get comfy and take a brief nap. Since they do from time to time tap into the power of God during service we can refer to this plan as an upgrade from baptism: Baptism plus one. We can still use this type of phone these days.

There are still basic pre-paid phones and plans that only allow for a small amount of minutes each month with phone privileges only.

This type of plan is a legitimate plan. It is a legitimate choice. If that is all you care to know about God and your relationship to God and to the family of God this may be the plan you need. However, this plan comes with a warning.

Revelation 3.16: So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth.

See, God is passionate about us and wants us to be passionate about him. He does not want us not to care. And he is not going to put himself out there for you until he is sure you want him. The Holy Spirit is gentle and will not force himself upon anyone. But God has so much more for us. Just like modern technology constantly increases our power, so the Holy Spirit is waiting in the offing for us to invite him into our lives in a more dynamic way.

As technology developed, new phones came out and we have this second model. This is one of the first types that actually came with a key pad and now it also gave us features as a cameral. We could phone, text messages and take pictures.

The plans to operate this phone were upgraded and we could even receive our emails. So now we could do quite a bit of business as we scurried about our day. The cell phone was becoming intricately woven into the fabric of our lives. This is the next level of commitment to Christ. We have tasted and seen that God's way is the best way. We have let the Holy Spirit have some control of our lives. We have begun to implement some of the disciplines – prayer, church attendance and service. We have increased the number of hours we spend with God every month. Like the new cell phones we have had to upgrade our plan with God. But the gifts we receive from God at this level begin to be amazing. We see God's character in us everywhere we go. Out of the blue we may give up our place in line to a senior who is having trouble standing. We may visit other parishioners who have not been in church to see how they are doing. We enjoy the fellowship we receive at church and begin to attend some of the fundraisers, helping with Thanksgiving and maybe even volunteering to be on a committee.

Our attendance on the committee may be a little less than regular, but we are involved in God's Kingdom about as much as we want to be...and that is a legitimate choice to. BUT... God has so much more.

Now we bring you the phone of phones. This phone is the most powerful out today. It has all the options. The cost is much higher to operate this on a full time basis with all its bells and whistles. Some of us get excited about this phone, purchase it, and sign up for the most powerful package that is out there. But then.... We turn on the phone option, the text option, the hands free driving option, the camera, the social networking option, and then we run out of knowledge of how to use all the other apps and options that are right at our finger tips. I have to admit that that is where I am with this phone. Verizon offers a two hour course on how I can get the most out of this phone but I do not want to invest the time it takes to go to the class and then work out all the kinks of learning how to function in this new technological world. Well that is the conundrum we face as Christians.

We HAVE invested in some of the upgrades available through the Holy Spirit but there is so much more! The Holy Spirit wants to endue us with the same power he brought to Jesus and the apostles and the first century church. But it takes quite an investment of our time and attention to move into that place where He can give us all that there is to get.

We must be willing to go through the learning process to learn about what is available to us. Then we have to wrestle with the working out of those things in our daily lives. This takes time and discipline and it takes passion. We must be as passionate about God as God is passionate about us. We must want to go beyond the basic and basic plus one plans and search and wait and pray for the upgrades that are available to us through the Holy Spirit. We must once again quit playing church and seriously seek to be the church as conceived not in our own minds but in the mind of God and available to us through the written word and the work of the Holy Spirit.

As you leave this place today, think about upgrading your Spiritual plan. Can you become as excited about God as you are about technical devices? Perhaps some of you are not at all excited about technology and all that it offers. Is that the attitude you have about God? Or do you want more from that relationship than you want from your cell phone? It is up to you. You chose. Then go to God and let Him know. Wait on the Holy Spirit and allow the Him to come upon you and say the words he said of Christ... You are my beloved child. In you I am well pleased.