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Larkspur, California  
Isaiah 42:1-9; Matthew 3:13-17  
"Remember and Rejoice"

A recent review of the movie "True Grit" states that in the early version of the film with John Wayne there were "good guys" and "bad guys." In the modern version directed by the Coen Brothers even the good guys are bad. The sermon today is about baptism which affirms the "good" in "good guys."

In every baptism service we are encouraged to "remember and rejoice in our own baptism, as we celebrate this sacrament."

Most of us don't remember our baptism since we were baptized as babies. I remember my children's baptisms.

Anna was baptized by The Rev. Donald Dowie in the Scottsville Presbyterian Church, Pietermaritzburg, South Africa, where she was born. I was a student at the university across the street where Suellen taught in the Educational Psychology department.

David was also born in Pietermaritzburg but we moved to the US when he was a baby and he was baptized by the Rev. Dr. Herman Waetjen at First Presbyterian Church in San Anselmo where we attended while I studied at the San Francisco Theological Seminary.

These baptisms were extremely important because they laid upon Suellen and me the importance and responsibility of bringing up Anna and David in the Christian way. The church was an extended family that also took on the responsibility to nurture our children.

When the church asks us to remember and rejoice in our baptism it is encouraging us to acknowledge our baptism and remember what is given in baptism. It points us to the meaning of baptism.

In a vicarious way we remember our baptism when we experience the baptism of others. The intent of the baptismal service is to celebrate the baptism at hand and to soak up every word said that day.

I love that "rejoice" is included because baptism is a happy time. It welcomes us into God's family. It brings us into a particular family which for us is Redwoods Presbyterian Church. The word "rejoice" comes from the service that prepared the church for the latest *Book of Common Worship*. The words there are: "Let us remember with joy..." which is just as good.

Since our family was far away from our biological families we never worried about grandparents for our children. They were in the church and every person in every church

community has loved our children. They (our children) were fortunate. We all are fortunate to be members of this extended family.

I like to tell the story that in some churches in earlier centuries the baptismal font was in the shape of a womb which symbolized a person's birth through the womb of the church. A child entered the world of light and air through the mother's womb and the world of the church through the womb of the church.

On Monday when I was reading the Gospel text for today I was visited by Leslie Anderson the daughter of two faithful and longtime members who died in the past three years. Leslie has been cleaning house and found some church-related mementoes and wanted to pass them on with permission to pitch.

One item was a booklet called; "Why We Baptize Our Children," copy right, 1953, by W. L. Jenkins. While our Directory of Worship has adequate explanations of baptism and I have a good idea of what baptism means I like the outline given in this booklet.

Leslie saw my reading of this Gospel text coupled with her giving me the booklet as serendipity. Why not? It outlines quite clearly what we remember and rejoice in our baptism. The meaning of baptism is given in five brief points in what might be regarded as quaint language.

1. Baptism is recognition of a covenant relationship.

We have known of babies born in another country who are Americans because their parents are Americans, writes Jenkins. These children are not "aliens" but citizens of *this* country. Thus it is with children of believing parents, they are born members of God's family. Baptism recognizes that our children are God's children, and God claims them as God's own. God's covenant is "to us and our children."

In the baptismal welcome the pastor says that the one baptized is "now received into the holy catholic church ("catholic" meaning "universal"). Through baptism God has made him or her members of the household of God..."

2. Baptism is an expression of thanksgiving.

The booklet adds that baptism is an expression of gratitude to God for the gift of new life; it is praise for all the lovely hopes that cluster around birth – reverence for the mystery of our being and the wonder of life, thanksgiving to God, in "whom we live and move and have our being."

3. Baptism is a symbol of cleansing.

Baptism is the seal of cleansing. It implies human frailty and is the outward sign of God's cleansing, regenerating and renewing grace.

4. Baptism acknowledges an obligation.

The language of the booklet makes one feel that we have lost some of the art of communication. It states: "Heaven lies about us in our infancy!" (In other words, heaven is all around us in our infancy). That is poetry – and near kin to religion. Moreover, it expresses our feelings when we take a baby in our arms. Responding to this natural and lovely emotion, we recognize that the training of a child is serious business, and that our poor best needs reinforcement. We need God. Conscious of that need, we engage in this God-given rite, by which publicly and in a way that is hallowed by long custom we say that we accept all our God-given responsibilities. Gladly, in God's presence, we pledge ourselves to such self-discipline and devotion as will make our lives a real example to our children, and dedicate ourselves to such Christian activities as will help them in their Christian living." That's Bill and Melba Anderson through and through.

##### 5. Baptism is an act of dedication.

In baptism, we dedicate our child to God. We consciously and willingly consecrate our child to God's will and purpose. The child belongs first of all to God. So we present our child to God to be employed as God pleases as part of God's great plan. We also dedicate ourselves to be God's instruments to receive the realm of God like a child and to bring up our children in the love and grace of God.

It occurs to me that even though our children are grown into adults we can affirm and reaffirm their relationship and dedication to God. Every point just stated applies to baptized teens and adults.

Finally, a comment on the Gospel text. Jesus was compelled to be baptized even though it was John's "baptism of repentance." Scholars feel that Jesus didn't need to repent but in going to baptism he identified with those who were baptized.

The text states that he did it to "fulfill all righteousness." He identifies with the lost, broken, oppressed, dehumanized and abused and dies to these things in the water of baptism and rises to new life and embarks on his righteous love journey. As the one to come – the Messiah, as he was thought to be – Jesus fulfilled the promises of the Hebrew Bible, like those read in the Isaiah text today.

"Righteousness" is synonymous with "justice" and it is no coincidence that just prior to the words of remembering and rejoicing in the baptism service are the words: "By water and the Holy Spirit, we are made members of the church, the body of Christ, and joined to Christ's ministry of love, peace, and justice. Let us remember and rejoice in our own baptism, as we celebrate this sacrament."

Baptism sets Christians on a journey which lasts the whole course of their lives and like Jesus we are baptized to "fulfill all righteousness" which is to be about Christ's amazing ministry of love, peace and justice. We remember with joy... Amen.