

“THE GOSPEL IN GREAT MOVIES, ACT II:
II - “THE LION KING”
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Elkton United Methodist Church
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Isaiah 43:1-7

Mark 1:9-11

This morning, my friends, you’re invited to a baptism.

(Show opening scene of “The Lion King.”)

That was the opening scene of a wonderful Disney movie by the name of “The Lion King.” While it was not an actual baptism of course, it was filled with wonderful images that call to mind baptism. From the very beginning, we saw it. The community gathered together from all over to one place. A baby has been born and his life is being celebrated. He is marked as someone special, held up in front of the community, and God’s favor shines on him in that glorious beam of light!

A pretty similar film could be made for every baby that has ever been baptized in this place. The community gathers - all of us, their proud family and friends, out of town grandparents and relatives - everyone gathers together with great joy for a baby has been born, and will be baptized.

The child is brought forward by parents and sometimes godparents. They promise to bring that child with faith in God, teaching him or her the stories of the faith, and helping them learn to live as disciples of Jesus Christ. We promise to help them do that.

Then water is placed upon their heads as a mark of their initiation into the community of believers, children of God and followers of Jesus Christ. They too are held up for all to celebrate and bless. It is a great day - a great moment - the moment of baptism.

It was a great moment in Jesus’ life too. We heard about it in this morning’s Gospel lesson. Jesus was a man when he was baptized, but then too the community was gathered to witness it. Then too a mark was placed upon Him - the mark of water. Then too God smiled upon Him with the heavens opening up and the Spirit descending. And for Jesus, even the voice of God - “With you I am well pleased.”

The moment of baptism is a great moment in any life. It is a great cause for celebration, for in that moment a person is named and claimed and empowered to be the person God created them to be. They are named Christian, claimed as a

child of God and a follower of Christ. From that moment on, they are part of an endless line of splendor, the Christian community, you and me. From that moment on, they can know that they will never, ever be alone - for they are part of a community of believers. When they are happy and celebrating, we will be happy and celebrating with them. When life gets rough, and they are sad and struggling, we will be right there with them, sharing their sorrow, wiping away their tears, holding their hands. In baptism, they become part of the community.

They also receive the power of the Holy Spirit, just as Jesus does. Which means that all things are possible for every single one of them. God empowers each of them through the power of the Holy Spirit to be the person He wants them to be. The possibilities are endless, the potential unimaginable!

The moment of baptism is a great moment in any life. And so it was with Simba, the little lion cub in "The Lion King." He was marked, named, brought into the community. He was special and precious and destined for great things.

But then as the movie goes on, so does life. And as life is wont to do, it gets complicated for Simba. Oh, it starts out well enough. Life is good for Simba. Under the watchful eye of his mother and his father, King Mufasa, Simba learns the ropes of life. He learns what it means to live in community. He plays and romps with his friends and grows up.

But trouble brews, and it comes in the form of his uncle, whose name is Scar. Scar is Mufasa's brother, Mufasa's jealous brother, who wants to be king more than anything else, and will do anything he has to do to ascend the throne. So he plots and he schemes, and he concocts a plan where Mufasa is killed and it looks like it's Simba's fault. Well, the plan works, and Simba, wracked with guilt, runs away and starts a new life. After he's gone, Scar is in charge and literally wrecks the land and life is miserable for all the inhabitants. Simba gets word of it in his new locale and knows he needs to go back and help, but he just can't bring himself to do it - he's wracked with guilt. He feels absolutely unworthy, and even responsible for the problems the people are going through. It's all his fault, or so he thinks.

He's in a bad place. He's lost his way. He's lost his sense of who he is and what he's supposed to be doing. And that's where we catch up with him now.

(Show Scene 19 of "The Lion King.")

Oh friends, how easy it is for what happened to Simba to happen to us. Life gets hard, and the joy, the affirmation of our baptisms slips away, and we forget. We forget who we are, and whose we are, and how precious we are; and we forget that we're not alone, we're part of a vast community. We feel all alone, burdened by

sadness, or stress, or guilt, or shame - and we forget who we are, and whose we are.

So, like Simba, today, we're invited to "Remember who we are." To look, like Simba did, into the water, and remember that Christ lives in us. That we have been called by name - that, in fact, God knows each one of us by name. Remember the words we heard from Isaiah? "I have called you by name. You are mine."

God knows you, and God loves you, just as you are, warts and all. No matter where you are in your life today, no matter whether you're filled with joy or wracked with sin, God knows you and loves you.

So today you're invited to remember that in a very special way. While a wonderful hymn is sung, you're invited to come forward to one of two bowls of water being held in front of the church. Look into the water, and remember who you are. Touch the water, put it on your forehead, or simply feel it on your hands. Take one of the shells as a reminder for yourself that you are precious, that God has called you by name, and you are His. Look at all the people around you, and remember that you will never be alone, because you are part of God's community of faith. Kneel in prayer and feel the Spirit pour over you and lift you up to go back out into the world again.

Friends, remember your baptism this morning and be thankful.

Amen.