

Baptism of Our Lord  
Dedication of Procession Crosses  
Blessing of Mission Trip to Lydia Patterson



# Our Time is Now!

FIRST UNITED METHODIST CHURCH  
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Today more than ever before, the church and the world need people who have a culture of call and a culture of giving.

The Baptism of Jesus is our guide. This story is in all four Gospels. In all of the Gospels it's near the beginning. It is the start of Jesus' ministry as a Servant Leader offering self-giving love.

*"Jordan River is muddy and cold, it chills the body but warms the soul."  
– African American Spiritual*

What took place in that muddy river that revealed the nature of God. The Human-Divine one identified with humanity so deeply that he was willing to wade in the water. As he came out of the water

**the heaven was opened,  
and the Holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form like a dove.**

**And a voice came from heaven,  
"You are my Child, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased."**

God was saying to Humanity, **"Our time is now!"**

That same voice resounds in you and in me in the ordinary events of our lives. Listen for that Voice! There are lots of voices speaking to us all the time that evoke fear, failure and frustration.

This Voice is a Blessing that is also a Calling: **You are my Beloved, in you I am well-pleased. Our time is now!**

Our Time **is** Now. I was thinking and thinking how to talk about our calling in ways that are down-to-earth. Then Wednesday something happened. Calls and texts let us know our Youth Group was going to have a big jump in numbers. Choirs were back. Children's Choirs, Young Adult Open Table, our Companions in Christ group, Susannas. We had rooms ready. Brent, Jay, and Sam coordinated their schedules so they could be in multiple places in the building at the same time. My job was to roam and connect with those coming and going, with parents of new youth group members, and make sure people knew where things were happening in our building.

Then came the Call. I knew it was "the Call" because of the edge in Brent's voice. I answered my vibrating cell and heard concern clearly in his tone:

"Are you in the building? Our new nursery worker isn't here." The Call!

Safe Sanctuaries policies mean we need two persons. A mom showed up in the nick of time to help with a diaper. Whew! She was willing to help me, but when I found out she was on her way to the Young Adult group, I urged her to go on "I really want to," she said. Then down the hall came Sara Simmons Bankson, a little early for Susannas Circle. "Sure, I'll help," Sara said as I invited her to join me in the Call to the nursery.

It was a hoot. Sara and I chose to focus on improving interactions not on tidiness. Translation: the kids had almost every toy out and we focused on not using the tricycle to "surprise" children hiding in the big tube. Some started cooking on the play stove, and wanted me to eat their pretend Mexican meal. One gave me a sombrero. Plate and bowls started arriving. So did the check. "That will be \$50," one of our 5-year-olds said. "If my meal costs that much, then I am sure you are fixing some food for me to take home," was my reply. More scurrying around the pretend stove yielded a lot of pretend take out food.

This wasn't the first time Sara and I heard The Call to take care of children. When she was a Church and a Community Worker in North Omaha, before becoming a pastor, Sara and I were driving down a major street and saw a baby carriage in the median.

“Stop!” Sara yelled, “There’s a baby in that carriage. Stop.” She was right. A mom a block away yelled to us that she was late to work and babysitter was coming. A little later a matriarch of the community also stopped and started yelling to the mom and the still-distant baby sitter, “What in the world are you thinking?!” We heard her words as a “call” to get back in the car. The matriarch had a “teaching moment” with them.

Wednesday, word travelled through church that I was in the nursery with a sombrero on my head. When Open Table was done, Sam showed up and about died laughing. “Put you in the nursery and you let them trash the place,” he said. “Our priorities were on interactions, not tidiness,” I smiled. Sam took pictures. They’ve probably already gone viral.

We live in challenging times. Just trying to be in touch with the 1000 or so that regularly float in and out of our major events here is hard work.

Some want email contact only, some want phone calls, some read their snail mail, many don’t. Some never check email but will respond quickly using FaceBook messages, some pay attention most to text messages.

That limits us to 160 characters. Can we hear “the Call” in 160 letters and spaces?

Especially when it comes to us in such mundane, nearly inaudible ways?

Our lives are full of lots of voices whispering messages about our inadequacies. All generations now exhibit a sense of entitlement, and many retreat to seeing self as a victim. Wouldn’t it be nice if every day the heavens opened and we heard a voice: **You are my Beloved, in you I am well-pleased.**

**Our time is now.** That’s what that Voice is saying to us today. How are you going to make a difference with your life? How will you serve my people who don’t even know how to ask for what they need? How will you connect with people who don’t think they have the right to come into my House? How can you nurture in yourselves and others a culture of Call and of Giving?

I live by the Isaiah passage. I always encourage wedding couples to use it in their ceremony: **“I have already saved you. I have called you by**

**name and you are mine. When you go through the deep waters of life they will not overwhelm you; the fires of life will not consume you...You are precious, I love you and I honor you.”** Ponder with me how God honors us.

Today, though, the Acts passage grabs hold of me. I may listen for the big voice:

**You are my Beloved, in you I am well-pleased.**

The story in Acts shows us what we can do when we don’t hear the voice. Samaritans were not considered real people. They were ignored or derided by leaders in the Jewish faith. They started believing in Jesus as Christ and were baptized. They heard no audible Voice. They did not feel the Holy Spirit. They doubted they were good enough to be Companions on the Way of Christ.

They heard about God’s love from ordinary Christians like Philip. Church leaders, Apostles, stayed in Jerusalem. They heard how Samaritans did not feel welcome in Jerusalem, and had not experienced the Holy Spirit speaking to them. Then the Apostles, the church leaders, got up and went to the Samaritans.

Their actions said: **“You are precious in God’s sight, let us be God’s Voice, let us be a channel of the Holy Spirit to you, with you.”** From that time on we who follow the Human-Divine One have been empowered speak God’s Voice of Love and Redemption. *God’s voice will speak through us and to us at Lydia Patterson.*

If there ever was a time when those who love God need to speak God’s Voice, that time is now. God is saying through us as a church and as individuals, **“You are beloved. Together, through my Holy Spirit, our time is now!”**

### **Prayers of the Faithful:**

We pray that you will help us hear your voice  
saying you claim us as your beloved,  
and invite us to share that call with others,  
by serving as increasingly effective channels of your love and peace.

*Slight pause*

For all who serve your people, O Christ,  
and especially those who serve you in places  
torn by violence or religious strife.

We pray to you, God in your mercy, **Hear our Prayer**

For those who feel exiled from your Church,  
and cannot find a smooth path by which they can come home,  
help us to be your Voice that lets them know they are beloved by you  
and have a place in your heart and in your Church.

God in your mercy, **Hear our Prayer**

For those who need to feel your healing power,  
and for all who care for them.

We pray to you, God in your mercy, **Hear our Prayer**

For those who have died, including Bob James, Jackie Gottschall,  
and for all anywhere who grieve.

Give us so deep a faith that in all times and in all places we may without  
fear commit those we love and ourselves to your constant love and care.

We pray to you, God in your mercy, **Hear our Prayer.**

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We ask for a blessing as we leave on a Mission and Service Trip,  
As we give encouragement and as we receive hospitality  
that by your Holy Spirit,

*your voice will speak through us and to us at Lydia Patterson*

And for all of us, serving you here or far away,  
may your voice speak to us in all the everyday events of our lives  
so that every part of us may be empowered, refined, and guided  
by your Holy Spirit;

let us live knowing that truly **our time is now.**

### **OLD TESTAMENT SCRIPTURE ISAIAH 43:1-7**

But now thus says the Lord who created you, O Israel:

Do not fear, for I have already saved you;

I have called you by name, you are mine.

<sup>2</sup>When you pass through the waters, I will be with you;

and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you;

when you walk through fire you shall not be burned,

and the flame shall not consume you.

<sup>3</sup>For I am the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, your  
Savior.

I would give up whole nations in exchange for you.

<sup>4</sup>Because you are precious in my sight, I honor you, and I love  
you,

I would give people in return for you, nations in exchange for  
your life. <sup>5</sup>Do not fear, for I am with you:

I will bring your offspring from the east, and from the west I will  
gather you;

<sup>6</sup>I will say to the north, "Give them up,"

and to the south, "Do not withhold;

bring my sons from far away and my daughters from the end of the  
earth—

<sup>7</sup>everyone who is called by my name, whom I created for my  
glory, whom I formed and made."

### **EPISTLE SCRIPTURE ACTS 8:14-17**

Now when the apostles at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had  
accepted the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them.

<sup>15</sup>The two went down and prayed for them that they might receive the  
Holy Spirit

<sup>16</sup>(for as yet the Spirit had not come upon any of them; they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus). <sup>17</sup>Then Peter and John laid their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit.

**\*GOSPEL SCRIPTURE LUKE 3:15-17, 21-22**

As the people were filled with expectation,  
and all were questioning in their hearts concerning John,  
whether he might be the Messiah,

<sup>16</sup>John answered all of them by saying, “I baptize you with water;  
but one who is more powerful than I is coming;  
I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandals.

He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.

<sup>17</sup>His winnowing fork is in his hand, to clear his threshing floor  
and to gather the wheat into his granary;  
but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.”...

<sup>21</sup>Now when all the people were baptized,  
and when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, the heaven  
was opened, <sup>22</sup>and the Holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily  
form like a dove.

And a voice came from heaven,

“You are my Child, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.”