

Today we celebrate Jesus's baptism in the River Jordan. I was baptized as an infant and you too were probably baptized (probably at a young age). Do you know what the Greek word for baptism literally means? I didn't either until this week. (I'm asking about Greek because today's Gospel lesson from Luke was originally written in Greek) Here it is, baptism means: to be placed into. What an easy translation from one language to another – "placed" and "into". The people that I baptize here, my hands are placed into the water, I scoop some up and pour it on the person's head. As such, we are placed into the water of baptism.

Here's another way to look at it: if you are cleaning up after a Christmas meal, you would take a dirty plate and place it into the warm soapy water in the sink to clean it. Likewise, we are placed into the baptismal waters to wash us clean too.

But, like most things Greek in the Gospels, there are three sides to "placed into". Like a three-sided pyramid, the first side of baptism is a testimony. Either as an infant or as an adult, a profession or testimony of faith was given – first you state what you believe (Jesus is my Lord and Savior and I will follow him for the rest of my life). For those who have been confirmed, it was an adult profession of the faith that you were placed into in your baptism. So, the first side of the pyramid is a testimony of faith.

Let's turn the pyramid to the second side of baptism (placed into) – it is mechanics. There is a physical, mechanical if you will, side to baptism; you have to get wet. One wouldn't take a dirty Christmas plate and putting in the cupboard without washing it in water. The plate has to get wet and that is the mechanical side of baptism. When I meet with people to plan for a baptism, we spend time thinking about the mechanics of it; and we should, it's a very important aspect of it, just like the testimony given before the water is touched.

The third side to *placed into* is metaphysical. ... of course, you know we couldn't talk about something in Greek and not get to metaphysical (meta = beyond so this is beyond physical or beyond mechanical, if you will; it's more than just being placed into water).

As a quick recap, being *placed-into* starts with testimony, then mechanical (wet) then metaphysical.

I have a friend who went into the Peace Corps after graduating from college. She was "placed-into" Bulgaria. But first, it started with a testimony. She filled out the forms and applications and was approved by her preparation and belief. Secondly, mechanically speaking, she landed in the country. She had to be placed in so she could do her Peace Corps work. It couldn't have happened without her testimony. Now she's in the country, physically speaking, which means there's going to be a metaphysical change. Everyone that I have met who has been in the Peace Corps has told me the biggest change that they experienced was first to themselves, then to the people they served, and then to the region they were placed in. But first, and biggest, was the change inside of them. In fact, they were forever changed. The metaphysical change in baptism

is that it changes the person and it also changes the environment around them – which is why it is beyond-physical or beyond just the mechanics of being placed in the water.

Water that is used for baptism has changed. We treat it differently because it's holy. Not only that, on my desk is a 12 oz bottle of water with a handwritten sticker that says Jordan River. Someone went to the Jordan, emptied their water bottle and filled it up with the river water so that now we occasionally put some into our baptismal font. Ever since John did the baptisms in the Jordan it has forever changed.

Let me take a larger view of baptism so we can talk about it in our lives today. If I can generalize a particular theology of the meaning of life, it is this: we have an imperishable soul that was *placed into* this world. Our worldly ecosystem depends upon the other parts of the ecosystem to make the whole thing function. And, from what scientists can tell at this point, we are the only planet with life on it. We are unique in the universe. Here is something else unique – humans do not seem to play a role in the ecosystem. Wolves do. Sharks do. Heck, even mosquitoes do (although I am not entirely sure for what). Take out wolves and the rivers run poorly. Take out sharks and the fish population begins to decline. Yeah, it is counter intuitive but there have been enough scientific studies to prove it. But, in regional ecosystems without humans, those ecosystems do just fine. It looks like we've been literally placed into this garden (Eden) to walk with God and to learn something; but it doesn't depend on us and our involvement in it.

Like you, I've been watching with horror the wildfires burning in the LA area. And, like you, I have friends there too. Going through the worst hurricane season on Longboat in recorded history makes the disaster in the Palisades and Altadena seem all too real.

This is what we have been placed into. We are in a world with hurricanes, wildfires, tornados and earthquakes. We are placed into bodies that break down – needing new knees, hearing aids, glasses. We are placed into a world where cancer exists. And Parkinson's; and dementia. This is what we have been placed into. But that's not the end of the story. We believe that once our time in this realm has concluded our imperishable souls will be placed into complete union with God and all those we love but see no longer.

Let's remember what the prophet Isaiah said to us from God: you are placed into a world with fire but you will not be consumed; I am with you. You are placed into a world with floods, but you will not be overcome; I am with you. The Lord God has not forgotten about his people placed into this world – the one with earthquakes and cancer – God has not forgotten; God loves us and will be with us through each one. This is the testimony of God to us. The mechanics of God to us is that we are physically placed into this world. And, the metaphysical side of God is that we will have love, we will have peace, we will have joy even being placed among things that are passing away.

If you are barely holding on in a situation that you've been placed into. Let us remember our baptism – the testimony made, the water on our foreheads and the metaphysical to us and our surroundings – and let us remember God's testimony that God loves us and will always be with us. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.