

Mark 1:4-11
January 10, 2021

Grace and peace to you from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, and from God our Creator! Amen.

It has been quite some time since I have done a “Dot-to-Dot” puzzle; probably back when Lauren and Matt were young children assisting them connect those dots on back of kid menus at restaurants. A “Dot-to-Dot” puzzle is an interesting thing given that when you first look at the piece of paper, it is no more than a bunch of seemingly random dots spread across the page. On their own each is just a dot. They appear to have no *connection* to the other dots whether right next another or clear on the other side of the page. However, as soon as you start to draw the lines *connecting* dot-to-dot-to-dot something begins to develop. Slowly but surely a picture emerges. Finally, when you have the last lone dot connected to the other dots on the page you fully see the true image of what was once hidden.

I attempted to create a dot-to-dot puzzle this week. (It can be found on our website to print off – www.wbbethany.org) I was thinking it would be a nice activity for some of our younger children to do. Yet, after looking at the final project, I realized the early childhood educators out there would probably tell me not to quit my day job. There might be just a few too many dots and it even made my head spin a bit as I looked at the plethora of dots on the page. Oh well, I guess I created a family project instead. You are welcome parents. Have as much fun as I did attempting to connect them all together.

Yet, you will get there, and I also placed on the website an image of my completed dot to dot. (Feel free to decorate it as you wish) That is right – a bunch of stand-alone dots with numbers next to them are transformed into a picture by simply becoming *connected*. A dove, just as our text spoke about in the baptism of Jesus. As he came up out of the water, God’s Spirit came down from heaven like a dove on him.

We observe many *connections* in the narrative of Jesus' baptism as told by Mark's gospel. For instance, we have Jesus and John. They were connected by blood – recall they were cousins. They were connected by their ministries of serving God. And they are connected as Jesus comes to John to be baptized. But we have further *connections* in our text. The text tells us “people from the whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem” were going out to John, “and were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins.” Perhaps like individual dots scattered about randomly somehow God's activity in John was bringing people together and *connecting* them to one another in John's Baptism of repentance. And then Jesus comes from Nazareth of Galilee to be baptized by John in the river Jordan which brings a further *connection* to both John and those gathered who have already been baptized or will be baptized. And in Jesus' baptism we see perhaps the true *connection* of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. We see the *connection* and love of parent for child expressed in God's voice, “You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.” We see the *connection* of God's Spirit descending upon Jesus. In the baptism of Jesus, “God as parent, child, and Spirit were *connected* in a single unit ... giving Jesus a clear mission¹.” And as Jesus sets out, he too will invite others into his mission, to follow him, and to be *connected* with the Holy Trinity.

The story of Jesus' Baptism is found 6 times in the New Testament, yet the story of his birth is found only twice. I guess I never really paid attention to that fact. The biblical authors all seem to stress the significance of Jesus' baptism by referring to it often. And perhaps the reasoning has to do with the *connection* found in and received through baptism. In being baptized himself, Jesus is *connected* to those who were gathered with Him that day and all those who will come after Him, including each of us baptized into his body, the church.

The words from the liturgy of “Thanksgiving for Baptism” spoken at the beginning of our worship stress this *connection*: “Joined to Christ in the waters of baptism” ... “by water and your Word you claim us as daughters and sons” ... and ending

¹ *Daily Discipleship* Baptism of Our Lord B, Evangelical Lutheran Church of America (ELCA) website.

with ... “to you be given honor and praise through Jesus Christ our Lord in the unity of the Holy Spirit, now and forever.”²

Or hear the words spoken to each of us at the beginning and ending of our Baptism:

- We are united with all the baptized in the one body of Christ, anointed with the gift of the Holy Spirit and joined in God’s mission for the life of the world.
- *Congregation speaks* – “We welcome you into the body of Christ and into the mission we share.”³

We all long for *connections* and a sense of belonging, perhaps now more than ever. It is who we were created to be by God who lives in perfect harmony in the connection of Father, Spirit, and Son. And we are *connected* to one another in a variety of ways. We are connected by blood, friendship, work, and activities to name a few. We also become connected to one another in events such as marriages, funerals, illness, or amidst pandemics or derechos or winter snow storms the likes we had a couple years ago, in which we welcomed many strangers into this building to rest their weary heads and safe shelter for the night. In such events, we so often see God at work fostering new relationships, strengthening existing ones, and at times overcoming divisions that previously existed.

Living amid sin and evil those *connections* we share at times become disconnected and we are distanced from one another. Our individual dots are scattered to and fro. Where once a line held us together too often something severs that line, and we are but a dot once again on our own. We see it and experience it daily in our lives.

² Liturgy from sundaysandseasons.com. Copyright © 2020 Augsburg Fortress. All rights reserved. Used by permission of Augsburg Fortress under license # SB135727.

³ Ibid.

Perhaps it is some sort of argument or misunderstanding in a family which fills us with anger and even hatred. Perhaps, pride sets in and we find it easier to simply separate from another rather than to forgive and attempt reconciliation. Or perhaps it is jealousy, envy, or greed that gets in our way and clouds our eyes from seeing the bond we share with one another. Perhaps it is a lack of understanding, bigotry, or any of the so-called “isms” that erode our ability to connect or remain connected to our neighbor.

In similar fashion the church also at times becomes fragmented and disconnected by the stain of sin. Even in our community of faith we often hurt one another, misunderstand one another, and seemingly become disconnected. Yet, the beauty of it all is that in our Baptism we are connected by the grace of God to a bond that is never severed. We are forever united into the love of the Triune God who is always at work reconciling and returning us to a right relationship with God. In our Baptism God is at work transforming us into a people who live into their Baptismal callings as disciples of God’s grace and covenantal love. In our baptisms we are united and just as the psalmist states in Psalm 133, “Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!”

Dietrich Bonhoeffer writes in his book, *Life Together*, “The physical presence of other Christians is a source of incomparable joy and strength to the believer.”⁴ For Bonhoeffer, “Christianity means community through Jesus Christ and in Jesus Christ.” At times I think we may forget that unique and special *connection* God calls each of us to in our baptism. At times I think we become lost and do our best to sever that *connection* or struggle to recall, see and feel the incomparable joy and strength brought through our *connection* to Christ and one another. However, somehow God is always at work and perhaps when we least expect it God reminds us of that *connection* and draws us back into the beauty and goodness of the unity that is Christ’s church.

⁴ Dietrich Bonhoeffer; *Life Together*; Copyright © 1954, by Harper & Row Publishers, Inc.; p. 19.

Each of us is a dot. Each of us on our own is created with unique gifts and qualities. And in the swirling and life-giving waters of Baptism Jesus meets humanity and *connects* to us in a new way and by the power of the Holy Spirit God draws the dots to God self, connects the lines, and creates the awe-inspiring picture of God's people gathered in mission to share the gospel of grace and love and live into the hope that one day God's picture will be complete as the dots live together in perfect harmony and unity.