

The following is from a sermon by Richard Jensen: "The call sounded urgent. It was Pam Weatherby. ***"Pastor Washington,"*** she said breathlessly, ***"you've got to come to the hospital right away. Nathan just had a heart attack."***

Pastor Washington rushed to the hospital. He met Pam in the hall on the way to Nathan's room in intensive care. ***"This is all so sudden,"*** Pam said. ***"I don't know what to think."*** Pastor Washington tried to comfort her the best way he could.

Soon they were ushered into Nathan's room. Nathan didn't look good at all. He was terribly pale and looked very tired. Pam and Pastor Washington stepped to his bedside. No one said a word. They could see that Nathan wanted to say something. Finally, he blurted it out. ***"I don't want to die,"*** he said in desperation. ***"I want to live. I want life."***

It was always on Tuesday afternoons that Harriet Mead got her hair fixed at the beauty parlor. She looked forward to it. It was one of the few pleasures she had left in life. Life had been hard on Harriet Mead. Her husband had left her a few years back; left her to raise the three kids alone. Now the kids were causing her all kinds of problems. But here, in the beauty parlor, she could sit back, relax and enjoy being cared for.

Harriet always had the same woman fix her hair. Sheila Stone had been doing her hair now for several years. Harriet and Sheila had become quite good friends over the years. ***"Things will turn out right yet,"*** Sheila said to Harriet, ***"Just wait and see. Life has a way of correcting these things."***

"Ha," Harriet replied. ***"What life? You call what I'm living life? This is no life, I tell you. This is not living at all."***

The teenagers gathered in silence. Most of them had never even been to a funeral before. Now one of their classmates was dead--dead at 16. He had taken his own life. Mourning draped itself over their gathering. No one really knew what to do or what to say. They just followed along with the service. Soon the pastor spoke. He read from a note that their classmate had left behind. ***"I can take life no longer,"*** the note began, ***"I choose death over life."***

"I want to live. I want life," Nathan Weatherby said.

"This is no life I tell you. This is not living at all," said Harriet Mead.

"I can take life no longer. I choose death," the teenager's suicide note declared.

EACH OF THESE PEOPLE MADE "EPIPHANY STATEMENTS" ABOUT LIFE.

Life is tough. Life is difficult. Life is in jeopardy. Life is not worth living. ***What do you say about life?*** Most of us, I think, do experience many difficulties in life. Life can be hard. Life can be tough. ***We long for a better life. A more complete life.***

Life can be tough. Life can be difficult. But in that toughness, there is a bright spot. That spot is knowing and believing that we are children of God through our baptism. Baptism reminds us "whose" we are. We are Christ's children. ***Baptism reminds us of who we are, children of God.***

Our lesson this morning is FOUND AT the Baptism of Jesus. ***Jesus was baptized by John in the river Jordan not***

because he needed his sins forgiven, but because he needed to know that he was God's SPECIAL CHILD.

In Jesus' Baptism, this was a sign for Jesus as well as John that God had indeed chosen Jesus to be his INCARNATE PRESENCE in this world. **Jesus' Baptism was an EPIPHANY MOMENT--a manifestation, or a light, or a revelation of God's presence in this world.**

Jesus, as he grew up in his father's carpenter shop must have been looking for a sign from God to tell him when he was to go about his public ministry. John's preaching, John's baptism was just that sign. Jesus came to John not because he needed to be forgiven of his sins, but as a sign, a revelation to all people and a revelation to himself that he was to begin his public ministry.

He received confirmation in a physical way what he knew in his heart to be his task. God's voice, the coming of the spirit on him all confirmed for Jesus he was indeed God's chosen one, the one who would bring the good news to all people.

In Baptism, we too become God's chosen ones. In the pouring of the water and in the saying of the words, we become God's children in Baptism. ***We are chosen by God.*** He acts; he comes to us through the water and the word to make us HIS. A baby might be either a sleep or cry during Baptism, but that is all it will do. The baby will have no active part, that **is because God is the one who acts.** God comes to the baby and claims it for his own. **God does all the action in Baptism.** God claims it's life for eternity.

Let us turn our eyes back to our own baptisms, and recognize that it was God's act, not ours or the church's, we can do nothing outside of the Grace of God to affect our own salvation. **Our Baptismal birth into the family of God is a gift FROM God.**

This gift from God enables us to live with all the brokenness of life. ***Through that gift we have the Spirit of God walking with us through life.***

As we experience the "toughness" of life, remember that there is a bright spot--you are a child of God. As a child of God, you have his presence with you as you face life. He will walk beside you, or carry you through the rough spots of life.

Luther knew and lived for and in that "bright spot" of life. Luther lived in his Baptism and wants us to do the same.

"Martin Luther lived in his baptism. When confronted by the devil, he did not try to turn him away with words or reject him by his own power. When we are faced by temptation, we usually claim our own strength, "I can avoid this" or "I can make it go away." No, Luther knew he had no power over sin by his own will. He answered the temptation with "I am baptized." He knew that it was only by the power of the Holy Spirit, by the mercy of God, that the devil could be turned away. The devil has no power over us when we are covered by the grace of God.

Luther lived in his baptism by remembering it daily. Luther taught that all Christians should wake to the remembrance of that moment when they became children of God and that we should go to sleep with that same thought. In his small catechism, Luther writes that as soon as we get out of bed in the morning we should make the sign of the cross and say, "Under the care of God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen." We should do the same in the evening before we go to bed. Living under such a remembrance helps us to realize that God is with us daily, walking with us"

We must learn to wake to the realization that we are a child of God and fall to sleep in the peace and comfort that we are a child of God. And as we live each waking moment, we can have the assurance and peace that God through the Spirit is with us. It is that spirit of God that we received at Baptism that allows us to fight off the devil, to bring our cares to God through Christ, to find hope and peace in this life.

We must remember that we are a child of God and thus being that child, WE HAVE DIRECTION AND PURPOSE IN LIFE.

A closing story speaks about “OUR DIRECTION AND PURPOSE” as we follow Christ in this life.

"During one of the busiest times at Houston's Hobby Airport, a flight was delayed due to a mechanical problem. Since they needed the gate for another flight, the aircraft was backed away from the gate while the maintenance crew worked on it. The passengers were then told the new gate number, which was some distance away. Everyone moved to the new gate, only to find that a third gate had been designated. After some further shuffling, everyone got on board. As they were settling in, the flight attendant made the standard announcement, *"We apologize for the inconvenience of this last-minute gate change. This flight is going to Washington, D.C. If your destination is not Washington, D.C., then you should 'deplane' at this time."*

A very confused-looking and red-faced pilot emerged from the cockpit, carrying his bags. *"Sorry," he said, "wrong plane."* **What happens when the pilot does not know where he is headed?**

There are people today who are very confused because they have looked to the wrong persons to help them find DIRECTION AND PURPOSE in their lives. There are hundreds of Religions in today's world. New ones are born every year. **Many people are blindly accepting strange theologies --- theologies that will not help them find the life that Jesus is offering, they are blind to what “direction and purpose” they are supposed to choose.**

Do you have a life where you know where you are going and who you are going with?

Do you have such a life through your Baptism—a life that provides great DIRECTION AND PURPOSE?

Jesus found his direction and purpose through his Baptism and did GREAT things for the world—and YOU can too. As a Child of God, reach out to others each day WITH LOVING ARMS and prepare yourselves for those EPIPHANY MOMENTS THAT GOD WILL PROVIDE.

Amen