

“Signature Moment”

A woman who had no religious upbringing
Decided to read the New Testament
And investigate the claims of Christianity.

A few months later
She came to faith in Christ Jesus
And decided to be baptized.

Following her baptism
She said enthusiastically

*"I could feel the Holy Spirit descending on me
And I immediately began to see things
Differently than before.*

*I thought about my cousin Myrtle
Whom I despised with a passion.*

*I vowed once that if she died
I wouldn't even go to her funeral.*

But now . . . I'd be happy to go to her funeral."

~~

For many, baptism is their signature moment
As a follower of Jesus Christ.

As it well should be.

The day when they publically proclaim Christ as Savior
Being totally immersed in water
Symbolizing the death to old self . . .

And rising up into the newness of life in Christ Jesus.

“Signature Moment”

It wasn't really a signature moment for me.

I wish it had been.

I was baptized at the age of 12.

I didn't understand the significance of the moment.

We all did it because it was an expectation of us.

I wish I could look back at my baptism
And see it as it was meant to be
A defining moment in faith.

My own signature moment came later
When I was thirty-something.

And at that time, I wish my pastor
Would have offered me a chance
To be baptized again
So that I could remember the moment.

And that is exactly why I encourage you
To either wait until you really ready to be baptized

OR, to consider rebaptism
That it might become that significant moment
Marking the day you surrendered your life to Christ.

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Today's scripture lesson,
Takes us from the early stories of Jesus' infancy
To his baptism by John the Baptist.

“Signature Moment”

Not much Biblical evidence is there in those in between years
Only the of their trip to Jerusalem
When Jesus was twelve-years old.

We do know he learned the carpentry trade from his father
And they lived in the small town of Nazareth.

~~

What we don't know is what prompted Jesus
To begin his ministry when he did.

SOMETHING compelled Jesus to leave
A secure and simple life
In the sleepy village of Nazareth

And venture out from Galilee to the River Jordan
To be baptized by John.

Do you think it would seem odd
To family members and villagers alike

For Jesus to leave home at the age of thirty
With nothing more than the clothes on his back?

Maybe more than odd!

Perhaps more of an outrage or disgrace!

What had Jesus done with his life?

He was thirty, single, and still living at home.

Sound like some of my own kids!

“Signature Moment”

No, not true, my own kids couldn't wait
To get out of the house.

~~

In Jewish culture, all men his age,
Would have been married with children

Living in houses they had built, plying their trades,
And being responsible community members.

Not Jesus!

~~

You wonder what Mary or Joseph thought?

They knew destiny was just around the corner
And it was only a matter of time.

Each day that he was home,
Was one more day THEY had with HIM.

They knew, soon enough, Jesus would be on his way!

~~

Perhaps they began to see small changes
In the way he behaved.

Maybe Jesus became more restless
More withdrawn, more serious . . .

Perhaps one day, after breakfast
He looked out of the window longer than usual
With a far-away look in his eyes

And then, maybe almost impulsively
He got up from the table
Went back to his room

“Signature Moment”

Gathered a few possessions
And walked out of the door never to return.

~~

HOW DOES ONE SUMMON UP THE COURAGE
TO SAY GOODBYE TO HOME AND LOVED ONES
AND BEGIN A MISSION THAT WOULD END
ON A ROMAN CROSS?

~~

And so we find Jesus coming to the River Jordan
To be baptized by John.

Now why would Jesus, of all people, seek out John
To be baptized?

Jesus was without sin?
He didn't need a baptism of repentance?
He was the Son of God!

John himself said much the same thing . . .
Jesus should be the one doing the baptizing.

~

Some say John baptized Jesus to set an example . . .
To identify with our humanness.

Some say Jesus was an actual follower of John.

~~

Whatever the reason Jesus wanted John to baptize him
It was a defining moment for him.

For as Jesus came up out of the water
The Spirit of God descended upon him
And the voice of God said:

“Signature Moment”

This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.

~~

As I said before,

We don't know much about Jesus
Before his baptism.

But look at what follows . . .

We have this detailed Biblical account

Of his tireless efforts

To reach out, to heal, to comfort, to liberate
To save this broken and wayward people!

In those three years Jesus was a driven man!

It would appear, then, that Jesus' own baptism

Became his signature moment.

~~

So parents, you who have a thirty-something

Still living at home

Still trying to figure out his/her place in life
There's hope.

There will come a time when it all becomes clear . . .

When everything leads up to that moment

When you know, just know

Who you are, whose you are

And what you were called to do.

~~

Zherina and I were watching the Netflix series

The Marvel Mystery character, The Flash.

“Signature Moment”

Don't ask . . . it's something we do.

This past week something on the show struck me.

It was an epitaph on a tombstone
Attributed to Mark Twain.

Well, for what is worth, it's not a quote from Twain.

But anyway, it struck me
How relevant it was for today's lesson.

*The two most important days in your life are the day you were born
and the day you find out why.*

Whoever wrote this . . .
And call me a sentimental old cuss
Touched upon something of great truth.

Call it that signature moment.

That moment when you see with such clarity
Those things of God.

~~

The late, great Christian Church preacher, Fred Craddock
Tells a story about a man named Frank.

Frank was one of those fellows who never went to church.

While his wife and children went every Sunday
In this small Oklahoma town
Where Craddock pastored

“Signature Moment”

Sunday would find Frank at the local diner.

Craddock said that in this little town
There were four churches.

On Sunday morning there were more men at the diner
Than in any of the four churches.

He called it the Cafe Church.

Those that went there were all good men
Hardworking, family men
Ranchers, pioneers, and cattlemen.

Frank was the patron saint at the diner
And everybody said Frank would never go to church.

~

One day, Pastor Fred met him on the street.

He knew Frank, and Frank knew him.

They met and shook hands.

Frank began by saying, *“Preacher, I work hard and I take care for my family and I mind my own business.”*

And so, Preacher Fred left him alone.

I quote from Craddock,

That is why I was surprised and the whole town was surprised and the men at the café church were absolutely surprised, when old Frank,

“Signature Moment”

seventy-seven years old, presented himself before me one Sunday morning for baptism.

I baptized Frank. Some in the community said that Frank must be sick, said he must be scared to meet his maker. Some said, “He’s got heart trouble, going up to be baptized. I never thought he’d do that, but I guess when you get scared . . .” There were all kinds of stories. But this is the way Frank told it to me.

We were talking the day after his baptism and I said, “Frank, do you remember that little saying you used to give me so much” ‘ I work hard, I take care of my family, and I mind my own business?’”

He said, “Yeah, I remember. I said that a lot.”

“Do you still say that?” I asked.

“Yes,” he said.

“Then what’s the difference?”

Frank said, “I didn’t know then what my business was.”

~~

The two most important days in your life.

The day you were born . . .

And the day you discover why!

That’s your signature moment.

Have you ever had one?

Maybe it was when you were baptized

“Signature Moment”

And you felt a sense of cleansing
And healing and wholeness
A sense of purpose and direction

And you were lifted up out of this world
And caught a glimpse of heaven.

Or maybe it was the time when the minister
Made an invitation, an altar call
To come forward and give your life to Jesus!

And you felt the release of burdens
You had carried for years
And a joy and a peace
That comes with new life in Christ.

~

Or maybe it came at a church camp vespers
When encircled around the campfire
Singing your favorite camp song
You felt the love of God for the first time.

These are signature moments.

I just pray you might have experienced one.

If not, try asking Jesus for one.

Jesus was thirty
I was thirty-four
Rancher Frank was seventy-seven.

“Signature Moment”

These kind of signature moments takes two things . . .
Christ Jesus’ empowering, life-giving Spirit
And a heart willing to surrender to it.

I pray God might touch you
And empower you with his grace and love

And give you that moment of vision and clarity
That will sustain you through
The thick and thin of life
Now and always . . .

To God be the Glory!