



## January 11 – Broncos, Bowl Game, and Bucket Lists

My Dad was a Minnesota Vikings fan. He was born and raised in Minnesota. My brothers and I always had a soft spot for the Vikings, but most of us picked other teams as our favorites. My brother Dave likes the Seattle Seahawks. My favorite is the Denver Broncos. They have been on my mind lately as they are having a surprisingly good season. I'll take it.

Growing up, my biggest dream was to see a game at Mile High Stadium. I even had a consistent silent prayer telling God, "If I can see a game at Mile High, you can take me any time." That dream became a reality on November 2, 1997, as my brother Dave and I made the road trip to watch the Denver Broncos beat the Seattle Seahawks 30-27. It was amazing. Then, on the way back I remembered my prayer. I immediately began to add new experiences to my list. The one that I thought would buy me a lot of time was for the Cyclones to win a bowl game. I was not ready to go after all.

As we hear the story of Jesus' Baptism, it is peculiar to read just how little is said before this occasion. Matthew begins with a genealogy and then moves into a series of dreams that guide people. We hear of Joseph staying with Mary, the Magi visiting and going home a different way. We hear of Joseph and family moving from Egypt to Nazareth. Then we fast forward to John the Baptist preaching in the wilderness.

The wilderness is the place of transformation. In this encounter, we find that it is Jesus who is transformed. He enters this space as the son of a carpenter. He leaves after a voice from heaven proclaims, "This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased." Everything changes and Jesus is sent forth into the world.

I find it interesting to compare this story to the way that we observe similar moments. With many being Baptized as infants, the parallel is with our Affirmation of Baptism service. During this Rite, the Confirmand affirms the promises made by others in their Baptism. This is usually after classes and projects. This affirmation is the culmination of months or years of work. As such, it feels like graduation. We even joke about with things like "How do you get rid of a bat in the church? You confirm it."

In this story, the Baptism of Jesus is not some graduation or culmination. This Baptism becomes a commissioning as Jesus lives into his identity as God's Beloved. Why is it that we tend to think of the journey of faith the opposite way? We often look at our faith journey as a series of obligations to fulfill and then we can pick and choose what is comfortable and convenient after that.

Our Affirmation of Baptism should be more of a commissioning. It could be a springboard into a lifelong journey in faith. That said, we do a disservice if we put all of the pressure on the youth to live out this change in attitude. Each worship service ends with commissioning. Every week we say something like "Go in peace. Serve the Lord." What we do together in this space is not the end. It is a beginning as we are recommissioned to live out our faith and to share the love of God.

We do not gather in worship because we have it all figured out. There is this illusion out in the world that that is the case with the modern Christian Church. It is just that, an illusion. If you are out there and you are not sure if you have a home in a church because you are struggling or working through things, because you feel like you are in the wilderness, please know that this is exactly the place you should be.

We should never assume this means that everything will go easily and smoothly. The next part of the text highlights Jesus going out into the wilderness where he is tempted. Often, when we are in times of transformation and personal growth it is in places of wilderness. God goes with us into those places of wilderness. We are changed and then we are sent. Our faith is not a bucket list item. It is a continual journey. Our time together is not graduation, or an accumulation of effort. It is a time of transformation, commissioning, and sending, Amen.

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