

1 Epiphany Year A**1/12/2020****Isaiah 42:1-9; Psalm 29; Acts 10:34-43; Matthew 3:13-17****Rev. Mark A. Lafler**

Every first Sunday after Epiphany is the Sunday that includes our reading from the Gospel on the Baptism of Our Lord Jesus Christ.

Of course, an important event in the life of Christ...

The Baptism of our Lord begins the ministry of Jesus.

We all know the stories from the Gospels regarding the birth of Christ...

The announcement stories, the shepherds, the nativity, the wisemen...

We might be familiar with the one story we have of Jesus as a young boy...

where he went to the temple and his parents were looking for him.

That's the only story we have of a young Jesus...

The Gospel writers just weren't concerned about Jesus as a teenager or a young twenty-year-old.

And then we turn the pages to the Baptism narrative.

The Baptism of our Lord is when the story really gets going...

In fact, it's an interesting story...

Apart from the relationship between Jesus and John... being cousins...

which the Scriptures downplay at the Baptism...

Jesus approached John to be baptized in the Jordan River.

And the Bible says:

John tried to prevent him...

I don't know if this was a more private discussion or a scene that people witnessed...

But John said:

I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?

John certainly knew who Jesus was...

He probably felt really uncomfortable about Baptizing Jesus.

As anyone would... knowing who Jesus was.

No one is worthy to do such a thing...

And that is the point.

Jesus reply to John was this:

Let it be so now; for it is proper for us in this way to fulfill all righteousness.

And it was with these words from Jesus that John consented to the baptism.

In Jesus argument to be baptized he used an interesting phrase:

...to fulfill all righteousness

What did Jesus mean by this?

What does it mean that his Baptism was *to fulfill all righteousness*?

That phrase elsewhere in Matthew (chapter 5) refers to obeying the principles of the law...

here it expresses his obedience to God's plan revealed in the Scriptures.¹

It may also reflect that even at the beginning of Jesus ministry he identified with the sins of Israel...

In the sense of a confession...

To take on those sins...

preparing for the coming of the kingdom.

Even at his baptism, Jesus is looking ahead to his death...

Which he embraces on behalf of us.

It's in his obedience to be baptized and his declaration *to fulfill all righteousness*... that we see the marvelous love of God...

through his Son, Jesus Christ.

We, who are so underserving... are greatly loved by God.

God so loved the world that he gave his only Son...

And his Son...

even as he convinced John the Baptist to baptize him in the Jordan River...

¹ Craig S. Keener, *Matthew, IVPNTC* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1997), 85.

was anointed for the mission of giving his life for the world.

...to fulfill all righteousness

Last Thursday evening we started a new Adult Bible Conversation study on the Holy Spirit.

From the study presented by Fr. Dave Pivonka...

a priest in the Catholic tradition...

He wrote on our discussion guide:

There is nothing that we can do that would cause God to love us more and nothing we can do that would cause him to love us less.

Let me read that again...

There is nothing that we can do that would cause God to love us more and nothing we can do that would cause him to love us less.

Let that sink in ...

There does not exist a sinner... who has sinned so much...

that God can't forgive them.

Murder, extortion, greed... whatever...

It doesn't change the love that God has for us.

And on the other hand, ...

There is nothing you can do... preach to the masses of people,
find the cure of every disease, solve world hunger...
that changes God's love for you.

His love is not based on our achievements.

If you hear me today... hear this three-word sentence.

God loves you.

*There is nothing that you can do that would cause God to love you more
and nothing you can do that would cause him to love you less.*

And for us who have become his disciples...

who have become his children...

This love beckons us to follow him.

Scholar Craig Keener writes concerning our Gospel reading:

*Jesus' example calls us to offer ourselves sacrificially for an
underserving world as he offered himself for us. In a world that regards
moral boundaries as impractical, where nothing higher than selfish
passion guides many lives around us, Jesus reminds us of a higher
mission and purpose for our lives. By submitting to baptism by one of
lower rank who was nevertheless fulfilling his calling, Jesus also models
humility for us.²*

² Ibid., 85.

What do we do with this marvelous love of God?

We go and serve the world around us...

sharing through words and deed this great love.

Following the ways of Christ... the examples of Christ...

Not because the world around us deserves it...

But because we share the love of Christ...

The unconditional love...

The transforming love...

We share the love of Christ... as we have submitted to do...

Even in our own Baptismal Covenant...

Found in the Book of Common Prayer on pages 304 and 305.

It's there we respond:

C: Will you proclaim by word and example the Good News of God in Christ?

P: I will, with God's help.

C: Will you seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving your neighbor as yourself?

P: I will, with God's help.

C: Will you strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being?

P: I will, with God's help.

You see we are also called through Baptism to follow the way of the crucified life...

To live the way of Christ love...

Not our selfish desires...

But God doesn't leave us all alone to strive within our own power to live up to our own Baptismal Covenant...

Following the way of love all on our own.

There is a reason throughout our response in the covenant we say:

I will, with God's help.

God is present to help us...

We can't live up to our covenant without God's help.

And there is one thing that appears over and over in our readings today...

And that is the presence of the Holy Spirit.

The Baptism is the time when the Holy Spirit anoints Jesus for his ministry...

when Jesus confirmed his calling to walk toward his death on the cross.

The presence of the Holy Spirit at this event made manifest the strength and power Jesus needed to fulfill his calling of redemption.

The presence of the Spirit was prophesied in our first reading from Isaiah 42 when the prophet said:

I have put my spirit upon him; he will bring forth justice to the nations.

The Spirit was present in the Gospel narrative...

As Matthew wrote:

...just as Jesus came up from the water, suddenly the heavens were opened to him and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him.

And St. Peter shares the gospel to the gentiles in our second reading from the book of Acts and declared:

...beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John announced: how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power...

The Holy Spirit is all over the story of the Baptism of Jesus...

In fact, the Spirit of God is all throughout the story of Jesus.

As our Church Father Gregory of Nazianzus in the 4th century wrote on the Baptism of Christ:

Christ is born; the Spirit is His Forerunner.

He is baptized; the Spirit bears witness.

He is tempted; the Spirit leads Him up.

He works miracles; the Spirit accompanies them.

He ascends; the Spirit takes His place.

If you are a follower of Christ, the Holy Spirit is present to help you too.

As we may read from Romans 8:9-10

...you are not in the flesh; you are in the Spirit, since the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. But if Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness.

As believers of Jesus Christ... as Christians...

The power of the Holy Spirit gives us power to live out the love of God.

And that is good news because we can't do it on our own.

We need God's help.

Today, on this Sunday...

when we commemorate the Baptism of Our Lord...

we are reminded of the beginning of Jesus' ministry and walk toward the cross...

we are reminded of the great love of God...

we are reminded of our own baptismal covenant to follow Christ's example of love...

And we are reminded of the power and comfort of the Holy Spirit.

Today... this week...

Ask God for a deeper revelation...

A deeper understanding...

And a deeper empowerment of the Holy Spirit.

That he may fill us...

So that we may...

like Jesus Christ...

lay our life down...

giving our lives sacrificially...

for the world around us.

Amen.