

# You Belong to Him

1/10/21

God's Word comes to us this morning from our Gospel lesson where we hear these words once again from St. Mark: "At that time Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. Just as Jesus was coming up out of the water, he saw heaven being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.'" (Mark 1:9-11) This is the Word of the Lord.

Our world is full of examples that quite often make things look... well, different... In other words, things are not always what they seem. Someone who appears to be healthy and strong... may actually be quite ill and weak.... A highly successful hedge fund may actually be... a Ponzi scheme... An outwardly happy marriage... may actually be full of sarcasm, animosity and fear... The happiness reflected on ones' face... hiding the feelings of grief and depression... The list goes on and on... and you can probably add to it yourself with many of your own examples.

Several years ago, in fact, our daughter Paige and I visited the Holy Land. While there we traveled to the place that was 'traditionally' known as the area on the Jordan River where Jesus was baptized. We changed into our special 'baptismal gowns', entered the water and shared a baptismal remembrance together with each of us placing water onto the forehead of the other in remembrance of whose we are – something I have done with other congregations in the worship service.

Now, if one didn't know what we were really doing, it could appear as if we were actually baptizing one another, which we were not. So, yes indeed, friends... things are not always what they seem.

It's true for us, and it is especially true for Jesus. Consider that it was just over two weeks ago that we celebrated Christmas – The fact that the infinite God has come to us... as a little Child... That is something that seems impossible. I mean, really... God - the Maker of heaven and earth and all things... Almighty God... a Child?! And He looked like any other baby... nothing special.

Things are not always what they seem. That's why on Epiphany, the Magi made their big trip; Their eyes perceived an ordinary child... But by God's grace knew Him to be the LORD's Christ. It must've looked pretty crazy actually. Important, highly esteemed men - from a foreign land - on their faces... worshipping a poor, dirty... Child. But, then... things are not always what they seem.

And here we are this morning at the Baptism of Jesus... He doesn't look mightier than, His older cousin, John. By all observations, Jesus has been rather quiet up to this point. But by submitting to John's baptism - a baptism of repentance... for the forgiveness of sins - it would seem that Jesus has something to repent of. And if He doesn't... then why all the fuss?

Because, beloved... Jesus' baptism in the Jordan isn't for Jesus. His baptism in the Jordan... is for you. Jesus goes into the water this morning because things ARE not what they seem. Jesus goes into the water for you because you... are not as you seem. You are not the people you look like on your Christmas cards and social media posts and family photos. You're not really the bright, shiny people you try to look like on Sunday morning.

Behind those smiles... hides a great deal of pain that others, frankly... might not find very attractive. And sure, some of it is your fault... though some of it is caused by others; And... some of it's just the result of living in a fallen world. All of that, we know, comes from sin. But knowing this... doesn't make it any better.

So, what do we do? We self-medicate. And it's all the normal things we do to feel better: Drunkenness, and gossip, and stuff - All the things we do to help us ignore the problem... and put on a happy face. But happy faces don't make... happy people. Things... are not what they seem.

Take water, for example. It typically looks like plain water. And yet... when it is joined with God's Word and His promise... water is something else completely. In the beginning - at the Creation - God showed us that He actually used water for creation. That's what the Holy Spirit was hovering over before the Word even spoke a word.

Later on... God used the water of the Red Sea to save His people from captivity. And through the Baptism of Jesus in the Jordan... God sanctified and instituted all waters to be a blessed flood and a lavish washing away of sin. Through water... God creates, saves, and even re-creates. Water kills and makes alive! It doesn't look that way... but... things are not always what they seem.

It's right there in the Epistle reading for this morning: "We were buried therefore with Him by Baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life."

Because of what Christ has done in His life, death, and resurrection... Because He has baptized you into His Name... what goes for Jesus... goes for you.

At Jesus' Baptism, God the Father says, "You are my beloved Son, in You I am well pleased." Because Jesus has made His Baptism your Baptism... when God the Father looks at you... He sees His beloved Son... in Whom He is so very pleased.

Some days that's not so easy to see... because some days... things are exactly as they seem. We live now in a world where children get cancer... mass shootings are forgotten after a news cycle... elections are riddled with claims of fraud and cheating... and riots are considered peaceful protests. That is why Jesus' path from the Jordan does not go straight to heaven... but instead... His path is towards trial, temptation, and the cross.

Jesus' path reminds you that in this life you will bear crosses as well. And there's every chance that this may cause you to despair. But there is no need, brothers and sisters. There is no need to despair because you have not only been baptized into Jesus' death... but into His resurrection as well. This means that sin and death and pain do not have the last word in your life. It means that because Jesus was raised from the dead... so will you be.

Until then - you and I, and all of us together now - live and die in our Baptism and under the cross, as people... with a future. It means we live lives of joy – not hiding from the pains and struggles of this world... but sharing in the sufferings of our neighbors. It means we are freed from the lies we would tell about ourselves... and freed to live in this Truth:::: That because of Jesus.... God is very pleased with each and every one of you.

And to strengthen us in this new life... this morning Jesus adds one more blessing in His Holy Supper. By now, friends you know that things are not always as they seem. So... as you approach this morning... let your eyes see what your ears hear – That you receive here exactly what Jesus has said:::: His very own Body and Blood... into your mouth... for the forgiveness... of all your sins.

John's Baptism of Jesus... and Jesus' Baptism of you... means you belong to Him... to Almighty God. You are His own beloved Child in whom He is well pleased.

As we leave today, Martin Luther says for us, "To be little christs to one another." You who have been made and re-made in the image of God - who bear Christ's Name - You bring Him out and into a world full of people who do not know Him or do not love Him... People still pretending they can save themselves, if – in their minds - they need saving at all.

You depart here today to love all of them just as God has loved us. You depart here today full of the Holy Spirit, pointing to and proclaiming the Son... Who will Himself rend the Heavens once more... and He Himself... bring all of us to the Father... because you and I, beloved... belong... to Him! This is the Word of the Lord. Amen.