

Prayer of the Day:

Father in heaven, at the baptism of Jesus in the River Jordan you proclaimed him your beloved son and anointed him with the Holy Spirit. Keep us who are baptized into Christ faithful in our calling as your children and make us heirs with him of everlasting life; through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Verse of the Day:

Alleluia. You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased. Alleluia. (Mark 1:11b cf. NIV)

Sermon Text:

Belonging, it is one of those buzzwords we hear from time to time. Belonging or a sense of acceptance, inclusion, and identity within a certain group is one of the basic yearnings of human beings. It's one of the things that affect our productivity, commitment, and even happiness within institutions. So much so in fact, that businesses are investigating how to build this sense of belonging among their workers, think team building exercises and the like. We want to belong and statistics show that when we feel like we do, then we thrive.

Jesus' Baptism, at least theologically, is very interesting. Consider for a moment the second part of Holy Baptism penned by Martin Luther in the small catechism. *Second: What does Baptism do for us? Baptism works forgiveness of sin, delivers from death and the devil, and gives eternal salvation to all who believe this, as the words and promises of God declare.* Jesus doesn't need any of this. He doesn't sin, so he had no need for forgiveness. Because He is sinless, death cannot claim Him even on the cross He must give Himself up to its icy grasp. Salvation, the eternal hope of heaven, well, God made the place. So as it's creator, it already belongs to Him. It is His. Jesus, it would seem, doesn't belong here.

John notes this even as He also acknowledges the role Jesus plays in baptism in our lesson. *"I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?"* In effect, John says, "What are You doing Jesus? I need what You have to offer, there is no reason You should be coming to me for anything."

There is our conundrum. Of what value is the baptism of Jesus? Why is it not only included with our pericope, the regular rotation of lessons read in churches, but also given a minor festival day in the life of the church? That means it has been marked as of importance for the regular yearly contemplation of God's people for centuries.

The answer isn't really found in our lesson per say. Instead, we find it in the second lesson read to us in worship. ³⁴ *Then Peter began to speak: "I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism* ³⁵ *but accepts men from every nation who fear him and do what is right.* ³⁶ *You know the message God sent to the people of Israel, telling the good news of peace through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all.* ³⁷ *You know what has happened throughout Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John preached —* ³⁸ *how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power, and how he went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with him.*

Anointing still goes on in the world around us but we are not very familiar with it here in the states, though it no doubt occurs here to, just about anything and everything does. However, in the Old Testament anointing was a way that God regularly displayed those whom He had chosen to go about His work for His people. Prophets, who served as the mouthpiece of God in Israel were anointed. Priests, the go betweens for God and His people whether in prayer as they lifted their hands and the people up to God or in sacrifice

Text: Matthew 3:13–17

¹³ Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to be baptized by John. ¹⁴ But John tried to deter him, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?" ¹⁵ Jesus replied, "Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness." Then John consented. ¹⁶ As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and lighting on him. ¹⁷ And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased."

as they slaughtered bulls and rams, sin offerings and burnt offerings were anointed. Even kings, those entrusted to guard the people from the threats of enemies around them even as they guided them in their everyday living through the laws they made, underwent this public act to show that God had appointed them to these positions. Think coronations or inaugurations in our current political climate and you have a pretty good comparison, in a slightly less direct way of course.

So Jesus replies to John, *“Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness.”* This is what we have to do if I’m going to be who I am supposed to be for God’s people. And who is that? We’ll the fulfillment of those offices we mentioned before of course. In this season of Epiphany, we will follow after Jesus as He teaches and preaches, not just a prophet but the very fulfillment of every prophecy of Scripture, *the Word made flesh* (John 1) as we heard at Christmastime. He will not only fulfill the office of priest, He himself will be the perfect sacrifice for the sins of all people. Read Hebrews 10 for a fuller treatment of this thought. King, of course having defeated the enemies of sin, satan, death, and hell, He ascended to the right hand of the father where *He rules over all things for the sake of His church*, His body (Ephesians 1:22).

Jesus does belong here at this exact moment for this expressed purpose. So much so that as John baptizes Him, the heavens break open the Spirit descends in the form of a dove and the Father’s voice booms like thunder, *“This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.”* Jesus belongs!

But do we? Those words are words every child craves to hear from their parents. They are words we want to hear from our employers and co-workers. We want to hear them from spouses and friends. They announce that we belong to the group no matter how small or prestigious it might be. But do we belong when we stand before our Father in heaven? The answer is “no. at least not by nature.”

Oh, there was a time back in Genesis when God surveyed all He had made, man-kind included and announced that it was all very good. He was pleased. But it was short-lived. Adam and Eve fell for the temptation of satan who hissed that they didn’t belong. In fact, as he slithered up to them, he told them God was trying to keep them out of a rather prestigious club. If only they would eat the forbidden fruit they would truly belong. But then nothing was farther from the truth. As they sinned, they were ripped from the comfortable embrace of perfection and made enemies of the only one they had ever really wanted to belong to.

So it is with us. Satan wants us to believe that to fit in we need to follow in the filth of the world around us. We need to ignore the will of our God here and dodge the clearly spoken warnings over there and then we will be accepted. God’s holding out on us and if we just do this or that, we will have the world by the tail, almost as if we were god’s in our own right. Then we will be in a club of people whom He has made. But nothing could be farther from the truth. So often we not only separate ourselves from our God in our sinfulness, but we destroy the very relationships God has blessed us with as we do it. Leaving ourselves feeling more and more disconnected all the time.

So are we lost? Hopeless wandering in a world of sin until we are forever separated from God and one another in the icy cold grips of death. No, John had the answer even as He tried to deter Jesus, *“I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?”* Recall what Baptism does for us from those words we spoke before: *“Forgiveness of sins, deliverance from death and the devil, eternal salvation to all who believe.”* Or consider the words for the fourth part of Baptism as well, *Baptism means that the old Adam in us should be drowned by daily contrition and repentance and that all its evil deeds and desires be put to death. It also means that a new person should daily arise to live before God in righteousness and purity forever.*

Through God’s gift of faith, gifted in Baptism through the power of the Word, you are connected to Christ and all He has done for you. There you were born into repentance, which certainly acknowledges our lost condition but also runs to the cross where Jesus gave all that you might belong to Him. God called you His child, an heir of the very work your brother accomplished on your behalf so that you might be with Him forever.

Oh dear friend, no fellow sibling of our Father in heaven, Because God speaks to Jesus as He does at His baptism, so also He looks at you and announces, You are my son, my daughter, whom I Love. Yes, with you, because of the work of Christ, WITH YOU I am well pleased. You belong. Amen!