

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.

Lesson: Titus 3:4-7

⁴ But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, ⁵ he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, ⁶ whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, ⁷ so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life. – NIV84

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:

Baptisms, I love them! I always like to see a little child ushered into the kingdom of God. Sometimes they squirm a bit, sometimes they cry, sometimes they sleep through the whole thing. I've seen adults and young men and women baptized as well. They tend to stay awake! A wet forehead and a few extra words it's every bit as wonderful to watch. But I have to admit, on its face I doesn't look so impressive. A bit like Jesus walking to the banks of the Jordan without ranks of angels in procession without the fanfare of the world around Him, but then, then heaven rips open and the Father speaks even as the Holy Spirit descends. If only we could see what was really happening at each baptism. The Holy Spirit going to work in a human heart, a little mind, an aching soul, with more skill than any surgeon, slicing and dicing at the bonds of the old man, all while gently placing within that gift of faith, the new man, connecting us to Christ, to forgiveness, to salvation. It really is a "miracle each time it happens" as one of our hymns declares. Today Paul focuses us in on that truth as the Holy Spirit inspires him to pen words we have used in our Catechism to describe where the power of Baptism is truly found. Yes, at your baptism, **SALVATION Poured Out On You! THROUGH THE WORK OF GOD ALONE IN THE GIFT GIVEN AT YOUR BAPTISM.**

Perhaps it is best to widen our focus before we zero in on the words set before us this morning. Verse three lays out what we were. *At one time we too were foolish, disobedient, deceived and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures. We lived in malice and envy, being hated and hating one another.* Turns out we are pretty repulsive creatures by nature. That sinful nature which needs the Holy Spirit's precision surgical skill is a disobedient fool. Enslaved and deceived by the world around it, it constantly chases after more: the next high, the next accolade, the next pride packed moment or money multiplying scheme. Even worse, when it comes right down to it, we are willing to do just about anything to get it. We are all actually willing to live in malice and envy, even consumed with hate if it gets us what we want. Too harsh? Let's take a million dollars hide it somewhere in the building and announce that the first one to get to it takes it all home. Some will climb over the pews, maybe even over each other to get to it. Others, will sit

back in disdain for the scene that unfolds secretly (or not so secretly) deciding they are better than those who scramble about. And all of it for what, a bigger house, a fancier car, a few easier years which will ultimately give way to the same end as those who never had it. Foolish, disobedient, enslaved, deceived, hated and hating. While we can keep it all quietly under wraps some of the time, it's still there and it all deserves an eternity in hell.

This is where our lesson steps in. ⁴ *But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared,* ⁵ *he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy.* This close to Christmas the words leap off the page. *When the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared.* When Jesus was born, as He stepped onto the pages of human history and went to work in His life, His death, His resurrection. God saved us! Not because of our work, how could it be what we described above amounts to a few moments of worldly ease and the lasting torment of hell, *not because of the righteous things we had done, but because of His mercy,* because Jesus would do it all for us. He is not some disobedient and deceived fool. This is the one of whom the Father spoke in our Gospel lesson, *“You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.”* Perfect for you to die for your sin. Yes, on the cross He will give it all that you may have more than a few moments of ease but an eternity of perfect. *He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit,* ⁶ *whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior,* ⁷ *so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life.*

All that God does, He hands to you as the Spirit goes to work. He comes in water and the Word. He comes with His gift of faith. Reborn, renewed, that's what we are as God pours His Spirit out upon us in Baptism. Faith, the new man, given in those saving waters, connects us to Jesus, His life, His death, His resurrection that we might be with God forever. Justified, declared not guilty, we are made heirs, owners and partakers of eternity.

Yes, to disobedient fools, to those who struggle with hate, malice and envy, to those deceived and enslaved by the pleasures and reassures of the world around us, to you and to me in water God cleanses our sin. In the loving hands of a sponsor or a parent, He lifts us up in His loving arms and from the mouth of pastor God says it. I have marked you as my own, I have placed my name upon you. In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit generous grace, unending love, eternal salvation as you are connected to Christ Jesus.

I do love a Baptism! More importantly, I am thankful for what Baptism does, what God does for us as He goes to work in what at first may look pretty mundane and simple. Water, Word, a 5-10 minute ceremony, the world may look and scoff. Some may only see the work of the simple people around them. It all might look like John and Jesus standing in Jordan. But by God's grace and through faith, we know what is really happening as heaven rips open and the Spirit goes to work. Through now power but God's alone here He grafts us to the vine of Christ. Through God's gracious gift we are saved. 5 minutes that change our eternity as **SALVATION IS Poured Out On You!** Amen.