

A Baptism Pleasing to Heaven

THE BAPTISM OF OUR LORD [b]

January 7, 2018

MARK 1:4-11

⁴ John appeared, baptizing in the wilderness and proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. ⁵ And all the country of Judea and all Jerusalem were going out to him and were being baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. ⁶ Now John was clothed with camel's hair and wore a leather belt around his waist and ate locusts and wild honey. ⁷ And he preached, saying, "After me comes he who is mightier than I, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. ⁸ I have baptized you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit." ⁹ **In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan.** ¹⁰ **And when he came up out of the water, immediately he saw the heavens being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove.** ¹¹ **And a voice came from Heaven, "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased."**

IN THE NAME OF JESUS.

Paul gives us the word for Baptism:

⁵ For if we have been united with [Christ] in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his.

[Romans 6:5]

United, that's how the Apostle gives us to think of our baptized lives. United to Christ in his death, united to him in his resurrection, united to him in all that he is.

Baptism can be difficult to discuss. In part, because it is often taught by preachers of the Law as being a work of man—a decision we make. So what is it? What does it accomplish? How concerned should we be?

It is simple water, we can all see that. The same water used to make coffee, to wash the car; the same water that flooded the world when Noah built the ark, that drowned Pharaoh and his army, Baptism is that same water.

Now the Lord's Apostle tells us to remember that when simple water was poured on us and the promise of the Lord was spoken to us, in that Baptism, the Lord has done something. He has bound us together with his death on the cross, so that the putting to death of the guilt and shame of every sinner on the cross belongs to us as much as it belongs to Jesus himself. Or else Baptism means nothing.

And when the dead body of Jesus was breathed-in with life, and stood up no longer dead but now eternally living, and walked out of the tomb to speak forgiveness to sinners and bestow life upon those afraid of death, that resurrection belongs to us in fullness as much as it belongs to Jesus. Or else Baptism means nothing.

Baptism is the Lord's gift. It is his work. He instituted it. It bestows what he says, so that, in Baptism, he binds himself to the sinner. The sinner is now cleansed, is now brought into eternal life, and is bound together in oneness with Jesus in such a way that Jesus gives no daylight between him and the sinner.

Paul gives us the word for Baptism: United. In Baptism, the Lord binds us together with himself. It is a unity, a oneness.

Baptism has rescued us from being in a relationship, where two things are seen as relative to each other. When two things are relative to each other, then the next question is, how close? Are you near the Lord, or distant? Do you need to work on your relationship and try to make it closer? With a relationship, you're never all the way there. You're always working on it, trying to lessen the distance. There's always more work for you to do.

So Baptism rescues us from the worldly talk of being in a relationship with Christ. For to be separated from God even a millimeter is death. And to talk about how far you're separated, whether it far or close, whether it's a strong relationship or a weak relationship, is to have your eyes fixed on our works and efforts, rather than on God's gifts.

So Paul gives us the word for our baptized lives: united with Christ. In Baptism, bound to him in his death, in his resurrection, in righteousness, his holiness, in life-everlasting, bound to him in all that he is.

For to be cleansed in Baptism, to be forgiven of all sin, this is life-everlasting.

So if the Lord has, as Paul says, united us to Christ Jesus and his cross and his resurrection in our baptisms, then to what was Jesus united in his baptism?

To us. To our lives. To our sin and the sin of every sinner. To the guilt belonging to our names, to the shame we have been covered with in this sinful world, to everything we are and everything we have done which brings us into dishonor before the face of God the Father, to everything we wish we could hide, Jesus has been united to it all. Or else his baptism means nothing.

Mark 1:9:

In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. And when he came up out of the water, immediately he saw the heavens being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. ¹¹ And a voice came from Heaven, "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased."

The Holy One of God walks into the Jordan's water. He created this water when he along with his Father created the heavens and the Earth and all created elements and things on this Earth and in the Universe. This water has been gathered in the oceans, has evaporated into the clouds each season, has come down in gentle rains and in torrents, has coursed through the streams and rivers, and now is flowing in the Jordan. This water has had the holy Prophet John take sinners into its flow and pour this water over their heads, all while speaking to them the promise of the Lord, cleansing them of their sins, washing their guilt and shame into its stream, so that the sinner could leave the banks of the Jordan, and return to his life in Judea or Jerusalem, with the full confidence that his sins were no longer with him, but were in the water of John's baptism in the Jordan.

Into that water made foul with sin, Jesus walked, telling John to baptize also him. Though Jesus had no sin, he now bore all sin. Though he was holy, he now was covered in unholiness. Though he was eternal and the creator of all life, he now walked out of the water on his way to death.

And a voice came from Heaven, "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased."

What pleases the Father in Heaven is that the sinner is washed clean of all sin.

What pleases the Father in Heaven is that his holy Son, the giver of all life, take the guilt and shame of

the sinner upon himself. For the Father loves the sinner, and knows that the sinner cannot rescue himself from his own sin. And wanting to save the sinner, the Father provides the sacrifice to cleanse.

He provides his own Son. And he sets a prophet in place to take the sins of the world from the sinners, and to place them on his own Son, so that, having been baptized in the Jordan by the prophet, the holy Son has now been united to the sinner and his sins. And if united to the sinner and his sin, is also united to the death belonging to the sinner.

Into what was Jesus baptized? Into the sins of the world. Into unity with you and me and our children. Into our shame and death, our fear and despair. He was baptized, to put it in one word, into the cross. From the waters of the Jordan, Jesus had only one way to go—to the cross.

In that baptism, God the Father is pleased. He sees his Son baptized into unity with the sinner, and the Father says, ***“You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased.”***

That’s the Jesus into whom we have been baptized—into the Jesus who willingly walked into the water fouled by sin, to be publicly baptized in that water so that he could walk out of it as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

To this Jesus, the bearer of all sin, the forgiver of every sinner, the crucified one, you have been united in your Baptism. Which means, you are united to him also in his resurrection. He died the one holy death to sin; he died the death once for every sinner; and he now lives before the face of God the Father.

You also, in him—for he has bound you to himself in Baptism so that there is no daylight between you and him—you also may consider yourself dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.

And as we do see our sin, as we feel the shame our sin brings upon us, we again return to the promise of our Baptism. We see our sin, and in repentance, we may say, that sin my Lord Jesus has taken upon himself, or else his Baptism in the Jordan means nothing. As we see the sin of our neighbor, or the sin of our brother or sister seated in the pews, we may say, that sin Jesus has taken upon himself, or his baptism in the Jordan means nothing.

And in recognizing that Jesus has taken all sin upon himself, we may daily rejoice in our own baptisms, where our sin is daily put death and drowned in repentance, so that in our life of faith, we daily stand up to live before God the Father in the righteousness and purity of Christ Jesus, to whom we have been united.

IN THE NAME OF JESUS.