

Luke 3:15-17, 21-22/Baptism of our Lord

Jan. 9, 2022

Grace and peace be with you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

You know I like to do surveys, right? So, who here likes to shower or take a bath in the evening? How about the morning?

I myself am a morning showerer. Without my morning shower I'm totally off kilter. I need to wash the sleep off of me so that I can face the day ahead.

My parents, on the other hand, are night showerers. They like to wash the day off of them so that they can sleep peacefully.

There are also those, like the Japanese girls I met who were staying with a friend, who shower 3 or 4 times a day. That seemed like a lot to me, but that's what they did. And, while I was in Germany the people in the dorm I was living in only showered once a week with really strong smelling soap, one that would last all week.

It's interesting what people do, right? Especially the reason. When I was a kid, I thought everyone did the same things, but I came to find out that that is not the case at all.

I was talking with my friend who is from Poland. While she was attending the university there they didn't wash their clothing very much, because it was difficult to do. You had to check the washing machine out from the front desk – a bucket sized one. Not like the big ones we have here.

So, when faced with obstacles, I guess we probably do certain things less often or differently than we would if it were easier, right?

Now, Jerusalem is a desert. There isn't a lot of water there. I know this from first hand experience, because when I was there for a class we had to tour every single water cistern at every tel so we could see just how little water people had, how hard it was to get it, and how they had to store it through the really long dry season.

So, John, who was lacking water in Jerusalem, heads out to the Jordan River where there is a lot of water and where he can dunk anyone who wants to come be baptized by him. At the River Jordan, the water was overflowing – well, it was flowing anyway.

Now baptisms in Jesus' day weren't unusual. They were ritual baths used for purification. People would wash all their gunk off so that they could go about worshipping God. Cleanliness is next to Godliness, right?

But, John was taking it a step further than just a ritual bath, he was also forgiving people their sin, which was normally reserved for the priest at the temple after the ritual bath and the appropriate sacrifice.

But, here was John in the Jordan, far away from the Temple, without any dead animals or smoke, washing away all of the guilt and shame people had, so that they would be ready to meet the Lord. And this is interesting because John was in the line of priests, including the High Priest, yet he chose to stand in the river and wash sins away. With John, we already we see that the Temple is losing its significance.

So, just imagine it. The Temple was like a private back yard barbeque, but John chose a public pool party instead where there was no smoke, no killed animals, and everyone was invited. Everyone!

Come on in! The water is fine!

So, John was out there in the Jordan washing the gunk off the people - like how I shower in the morning to wash off the sleep and my parents shower in the evening to wash off the day – refreshing them so that they were able to either be at peace or ready for action when the Savior/Healer arrived.

There is, however, one significant difference between John in the Jordan and us taking a shower. John was acting for others at God's direction. The people were not baptizing themselves.

Forgiveness is one of those things that needs to be receive and is more significant when delivered by one who is called into that action, which is why forgiveness is such a significant part of our worship services.

Now, people always wonder, every year on this festival, why did Jesus get baptized? Well there are 3 important things that happened.

1 – Jesus was preparing himself for what was to come. He didn't start his ministry until after this baptism in the Jordan.

2 – It was God's will and Jesus does God's will, making his baptism perhaps more important for us than for himself. In his baptism, Jesus was proclaiming to us that he is here to do God's will.

And 3 – which ties in with Jesus' baptism being for us - Jesus joins us where we are. Jesus joins the people in the River Jordan. Jesus joins us in the muck and isn't afraid to wallow around with us in it.

When my mom was growing up on the farm in Nebraska, Saturday was wash the people day. There was only one tub and it was only filled once. The baby was the first to go in and it progressed up to my grandfather who was the last to go in. It went from cleanest to dirtiest I guess to keep the water as clean as possible until the last person bathed. But, everyone shared the same water.

And so it is with us and Jesus. He shares the same water with us. Together in Baptism we all share the same water – Jesus and all of us.

Isn't it nice to know that Jesus is not above joining us in the same bath water where we all come out clean and refreshed and ready to serve God in whatever way we can?

Baptism washes away all of our gunk, our shame and guilt, it's all sent down river so that we are free to serve God. There is no shame. There is no guilt. Baptism washes that away as the Holy Spirit comes into our lives.

Now our baptism is not the same as what John did in the Jordan for one very significant reason, which I just alluded to – Jesus had yet to be crucified, risen, and ascended. It wasn't until after the ascension that the Holy Spirit came to be with us. The baptism of the Holy Spirit and fire required Jesus' return to heaven.

And to clarify, Biblically speaking, fire in this sense is a refining fire – a purifying fire – like how gold ore is fired so that the things that keep the ore from being solid gold are completely and eternally removed.

For us, the impurities are the lies we are told about being unlovable and unworthy. In Baptism, God burns those lies away, and continues to burn them away every time they come up, so that we can fully be who God created us to be – unafraid and unashamed, freed to live our whole selves, free to be God’s love in the world.

So, Just as Jesus’ baptism was for us, so our Baptism is for the wellbeing of others. And so, in Baptism, we make promises to, on one hand, stay in contact with God so that the Spirit is energized and continues to burn within us, and, on the other, to also go out and love our neighbors as ourselves, sharing the good news of God’s eternal love.

It’s like the game electricity where you hold hands and when your hand is squeezed you squeeze the next. The energy keeps flowing from God to person to person.

And so, we are Baptized only once, because that’s all it takes. Baptism is not about us and what we do. It is completely about God and what God does. God acts first. God always act first, and in our one Baptism, God has prepared us to meet the Lord.

In Baptism, God has prepared us to meet the Lord in every person we meet.

We receive and then we respond. We are gifted so we can give. We are blessed so we can bless. We are baptized so we can bring everyone into a healthy loving relationship with God.

In our Baptismal Covenant, we are sent to bring peace and justice into the World and we are called to treat all people with dignity and respect.

In Baptism, God has made us ready to meet the Lord right here and now.

As we head into 2022, what does that look like in our community knowing that we are Baptized with Christ for both peace and action?

Thanks be to God. Amen.