

*The First Sunday After the Epiphany – The Baptism of our Lord*

January 11, 2015

Amazing Grace Lutheran Church - Pastor Chip Wilke

Acts 16:25-34

*About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them. Suddenly there was such a violent earthquake that the foundations of the prison were shaken. At once all the prison doors flew open, and everybody's chains came loose. The jailer woke up, and when he saw the prison doors open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself because he thought the prisoners had escaped. But Paul shouted, "Don't harm yourself! We are all here!" The jailer called for lights, rushed in and fell trembling before Paul and Silas. He then brought them out and asked, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" They replied, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved--you and your household." Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all the others in his house. At that hour of the night the jailer took them and washed their wounds; then immediately he and all his family were baptized. The jailer brought them into his house and set a meal before them; he was filled with joy because he had come to believe in God--he and his whole family. (NIV)*

On my way back from Wisconsin this last Tuesday morning, without getting into all the details of what happened, I'll just say I had several scary moments. In fact, I thought a couple times near Milwaukee and once in Chicago that for sure I was heading for, at minimum, a high speed crash. Yes, there were moments I even thought I might die. My heart was racing like crazy. Have you ever been there? It makes you think about what is important, doesn't it? You start asking questions.

Just before Christmas our neighbors who have become dear friends came over with gifts for our children. They had us sit down to tell us that they found several lumps in Stan's chest. They got the word that it is cancer. Have you ever experienced something like this for you or a loved one? It makes you think about what is important, doesn't it? It is times like this we start asking big questions.

Whatever our questions are, whatever the circumstances might be that cause us to ask them, and whenever we feel the need to ask the biggest of questions, what a comfort it is to know we have a God who has the answers. Listen to this awesome event in the life of the missionary Paul and understand that: **For our biggest questions, God has the simplest of answers.**

Paul and Silas had someone ask them the biggest of all questions. Recall the circumstances which led up to this question. How would you feel if you were telling others about the Savior and because of it you were attacked, stripped, and beaten? What emotions would you have if you were sharing the good news of Christ crucified and risen and because of it orders were given for you to be severely flogged? What would your attitude be after being beaten, hit thirty nine times with a whip with metal spikes, and tossed into a dark inner cell? What would you be doing as you are bound in very uncomfortable stocks and are being carefully guarded for the night?

This was the case for the apostle Paul and his fellow worker Silas in Philippi. And how did they respond to all this? "*About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God.*" Isn't that amazing? After all they just went through they prayed to and praised their

God. While they were giving glory to God in the midst of their trials something else was happening - **“other prisoners were listening to them.”** We can only imagine what those who heard this must have been thinking. After the day they had why are they joyfully praying and singing hymns? I’m sure the guards had seen many different reactions from flogged prisoners, but I highly doubt this was ever one of them.

And this is how God sets the stage to use His servants to answer a very big question. You heard the rest of the story. God causes an earthquake and the jail is open and the chains fall off. The jailer realizes the prison door is open. He doesn’t want to suffer the fate of his prisoners at the hands of the brutal Romans so he grabs his own sword and is ready to kill himself. He had to have a racing heart. He had to have questions. Suddenly, Paul and Silas yell for him to stop, tell him they are still there, and order him not to harm himself. They turn on the lights and then the jailer asks the biggest question of all: **“Sirs, what must I do to be saved?”**

My prayer is everyone here today knows the answer to this flawed question. The answer is not in what we must do. The answer is found in a sinless Someone standing by the Jordan River with a whole bunch of sinners waiting to be baptized. The answer is found in this One who had the Spirit descend on Him in the form of a dove. The answer is found in this Someone of whom the Father’s thunderous voice spoke words of approval: **“You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.”** The answer is here in the Lamb of God, the Christ, who came to be the sinners substitute. The answer to this question of how to be saved is given on His cross and in His empty grave. God’s answer to the biggest question is so simple our youngest Sunday school students could give the answer – Jesus. The answer to what must I do to be saved is Jesus! **They replied, “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved--you and your household.”**

Is it really that simple? Yes! Just read John 3:16. God’s answer to our sin is Jesus. God brings us salvation through Jesus. God gives us life and forgiveness in Jesus. God has already done it all and provides us with everything we need to live with Him forever in heaven because of Jesus. **“Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved.”** Now we can see why the jailer does what he does after getting God’s answer to his question. He brings them into his home. **“Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all the others in his house. At that hour of the night the jailer took them and washed their wounds; then immediately he and all his family were baptized. The jailer brought them into his house and set a meal before them; he was filled with joy because he had come to believe in God--he and his whole family.”**

There were two washings that went on in that house that evening. The jailer began to wash the wounds of the Lord’s servants. But there was a far greater washing done by God. God washed away the sins of the jailer and his whole household through baptism. From the smallest to the oldest, everyone in that whole household was baptized. After all, they were a part of all nations. The promise was for them and their children. Once again for their big questions, God gave the simplest of answers. How could they be brought to faith in Jesus? How could they be forgiven? How could they become children of God? God’s simple answer is in baptism. Through just plain water and God’s powerful Word they had the answer to all those questions. Now the jailer **“was filled with joy because he had come to believe in God--he and his whole family.”**

Is it really that simple? Yes! Peter once said, **“Be baptized and wash your sins away.”** (Acts 22) The apostle Paul writes in Galatians, **“You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.”** (3) In our baptism God covers us with the perfect life, the holiness, of Jesus. In our baptism God takes our sins Jesus paid for on the cross and washes them all away. In our baptism, God makes us His children. Think of some of the big questions: **“Who am I? What purpose does my life have?”**

*How will I make it though this? How can I fight this temptation?"* God gives us the simplest of answers – in baptism.

I was very thankful God brought me home safe and sound last Tuesday without an incident. It is sometimes those close calls that make you think about what is really important. You start to ask questions. But what I am most thankful for is that as my heart was pounding and I thought I was going to crash, I never once wondered that if something did happen where I would be going. For God has already answered that big question for me in the simplest of answers – in Jesus. What I am most thankful for is I did not have to question who I am, or how God feels about me, or why certain things happen to me. For God has already answered those big questions for me in the simplest of answers – in baptism. There God made me His child, and God works all things out for the good of His children.

I don't know what circumstances might come up for you or for someone you know that could leave you like this jailer asking important questions. When you have questions, or when they have questions, perhaps even some big questions, turn to God's simplest of answers. Listen to His promises. He loves you. He cares for you. He has already given us the answer to the biggest question there will ever be: "***Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved--you and your household.***" Amen.