

The First Sunday after Epiphany

January 12, 2014

Amazing Grace Lutheran Church - Pastor Chip Wilke

Matthew 3:13-17

Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to be baptized by John. But John tried to deter him, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?" Jesus replied, "Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness." Then John consented. 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. And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased." (NIV)

Mom asks her daughter, "Did you finish your supper?" "Yes," she replies. Then mom follows up, "Did you eat all of your food?" The truth comes out as her girl quickly makes an excuse, "Well, I was full so I didn't eat all my vegetables." Dad sees his boy playing a video game so he comes up to him and says, "Did you clean your room like I told you?" Without even looking up from his game his son immediately responds, "Yeah dad I cleaned it." Dad starts up the stairs saying he is going to inspect to see if his room really is all picked up and clean. Suddenly, the little boy hits pause on his game and runs in front of his dad explaining, "I picked up most of it but it's not all clean yet."

Does this ever change as we get older? It is tough to always carry through with doing all we are asked. To finish something so that it is all done. And if it is challenging for us to fulfill all our responsibilities all the way through when it comes to smaller commands, how much more is this true when it comes to bigger commands. How about the commands of our heavenly Father? What if God appeared to you this morning in a thundering voice from heaven and asked, "Dear child, have you done what I have told you to do?" Imagine what our responses would sound like. And if any of us respond like the children in my examples you do know that God would follow up with: "Have you kept all my commands?" It is a very humbling thought, isn't it?

It is also a reason for rejoicing as we gather today to witness the baptism of Jesus. For this is why Jesus appears here at Jordan's Bank. This is why the Christ has come. Jesus came to do it all – to obey every command given by God the Father. Jesus came to do it all for us. So rejoice and give thanks today for this awesome truth: **The Christ appears to fulfill all righteousness.**

Jesus was now thirty years old when He "*came from Galilee to the Jordan to be baptized by John.*" We call these years from Jesus' birth and the events surrounding it to His baptism the silent years. That's because the Bible tells us very little about what Jesus was doing all that time. Other than Luke's account of Jesus going to the temple at age twelve we have no other accounts of Jesus the first 30 years. Yet, now Jesus appears and here we have some insight as to what Jesus was and was not doing all that time. What Jesus had been doing was being a perfectly obedient Son both to His earthly parents and to His heavenly Father. What Jesus was not doing was breaking a single command of God. What Jesus never did was sin – not even during His teenage years. Isn't that amazing! I have often wondered what Jesus was like growing up. He would have had to stick out and be noticed don't you think. What would it be like to be around such a child, a teenager, a

young adult who was perfect in every way and never sinned?

But if we call these the silent years, other than at age twelve where we see Jesus obeying His parents and His Father in heaven, how can we say with certainty Jesus was without sin? For one, look at the reaction of John the Baptist when Jesus arrives to be baptized. Sinners were getting in line, one after another, confessing their sins and being baptized by John for the forgiveness of sins. Then suddenly here comes Jesus. He came to be baptized. ***“But John tried to deter him, saying, ‘I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?’”*** Literally, John gets into an argument with Jesus. Filled with emotion John says there is something wrong here. John thinks this is not right that he should be baptizing the one whose sandals he is not fit to tie. This seems backwards – John says Jesus should be the one baptizing him. Why did John feel this way? Because before John stood the sinless Son of God! What John believed to be true would soon be confirmed as God the Father would decree from heaven: ***“This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.”***

God makes it clear that Jesus is without sin. He is the perfect Son who pleased God in every way all of the time. So wouldn't John the Baptist be right? Why would Jesus come out to be baptized when He had no sin to be washed away? This was backwards. Dear friends, listen carefully to Jesus' answer to John's argument. ***“Jesus replied, ‘Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness.’”*** These words are very eye-opening. First of all, Jesus lets John know that His time has come. It is now Jesus' time to begin His public ministry as the Christ. The time of silence is over. Secondly, this needed to be done because this is the purpose for which Jesus had come. He came to fulfill all righteousness. Jesus came to dot every i and cross every t! As Mathew records Jesus said, ***“I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished” (5).*** Jesus comes to take the place of sinners. Jesus comes to do it all.

Isn't that exactly what you and I need? Again go back to what you would say to God if He asked you today, ***“Have you kept all my commands?”*** I would have to stand before a holy God and “gulp” because I haven't kept any of them. I look at all the things God asks me to do – honor your parents - be His witness in the world – to speak up & defend others rather than gossip about them – love my enemies rather than try to get back at them, and I quickly realize I am far from obeying even most of the time. I look at all thing things God tells me not to do – do not covet, do not be greedy - do not misuse God's name - do not give others a bad name, and I see that I am anything but a son with whom God is well-pleased. In fact, I am nothing but a sinner who deserves death and hell.

This is why what happens next is reason for rejoicing. ***“Then John consented. 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. And a voice from heaven said, ‘This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.’”*** This is Jesus stepping into my shoes. This is Jesus taking my place. This is Jesus coming to provide me with the holiness I need. This is Jesus coming to take my sin, my punishment, my hell, and my death. This is Jesus who comes to be nailed to a cross and die for me. This is Jesus who comes to defeat death for me. This is the Christ. This is God giving His approval to Jesus as the Christ. With the Spirit descending like a dove and lightning on Him, with the Father's voice from heaven – there is no doubt that this is the Anointed One God promised to send for us – to save us.

I pray you understand what is happening here at Jesus' baptism. Jesus takes our place. Then I pray you understand what happened at your baptism. ***“For 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” (Galatians 3).*** What a wondrous exchange! This is the reason tears nearly come to my eyes every time I witness another baptism. Jesus' gives us His righteousness. Because of Jesus we are able to stand before God and say: *“yes Father it is all done!”* Every command is kept. And as for every sin – they are all washed away by Jesus' blood poured out for us on the cross – all washed away by water and the Word in baptism.

At Jesus' baptism the silence is broken and we hear God speak very loud and clear as Christ appear to fulfill all righteousness. We hear God speak very loud and clear with words of love – words of love for the Son He loves – words of love for all who might become children of God through His Son. Now, dear friends, live your lives as the children that God has made you in Christ – children with whom He is well pleased! Amen.