

The Baptism of our Lord – 2020

Isaiah 42:1-9

Romans 6:1-11

Matthew 3:13-17

There were certain sayings from my youth that I don't hear much anymore. "You bet your sweet bippy." "Sock it to me." "Here come de judge." Say "goodnight," Dick. "Goodnight Dick." Perhaps you can tell that I watched too much television as a youth. Seriously, there is one saying that used to be commonplace, spoken with emphasis and universal recognition that I don't hear too much anymore. The saying was meant as a reminder to everyone who heard it that we all are accountable, that trust can be solidified or broken, that broken trust is a genuine loss and that there is honor to be gained by following through on commitments. The saying? A man's word is his bond. Variations of this statement are many. A man is only as good as his word. He is a man of his word. Is it just me, or do we not hear this kind of talk anymore?

The meaning of the phrase was straightforward. If you make a promise, you'd better fulfill it. A good man (gender inclusive) is someone who doesn't just make promises but lives up to them. How many of y'all know the blessing, the comfort of being able to trust someone, trust them to do what they say they'll do? How many of you know the frustration, the heartache that comes with someone who fails to do what they promise? Trust, I was told as a kid, was something I had to earn. I had to prove myself, provide a basis for the trust that was put in me. A fellow who demonstrates, over and over, that when he says that he'll do something, by cracky, he does it! You trust that guy, because there is a basis for it, proven, repeatedly, your trust has been earned. He is a man of His Word.

Do you trust God? The money that you carry around in your pocket says you do. Do you trust God? Why? It is a good question. That good question opens a good door, a conversational door, a door of the Gospel. I tell you that there is no more delightful door for a preacher to walk through than the door that opens this fine morning. The Baptism of our Lord; it is dripping with Divine commitment, God's loving commitment to you – each of you. He is a God of His Word, a faithful Savior who allies Himself to you. Such devotion, such care of every aspect of your salvation – He wants you to see it, to know it, revel in it. Trust – there is a foundation, a deeply theological basis that pops off the page and our Lord's baptism is an open door to Gospel beauty.

John the Baptist was calling sinners to repentance. The Kingdom of God was at hand because the Lord Christ approaches. Tax collectors and thieves, prostitutes and liars all make their way to the Jordan because the forerunner of Christ, John the Baptist was washing away their sins in the Jordan river. New things John is declaring. A new era, a new reality was close at hand. John's voice had authority. The Law flowed from his mouth and convicted the hearts of those who knew well their sin. The Gospel too was in John's mouth, the sweetness of a forgiving God, whose mercy is embodied in the Lamb of God who takes away sin of the world. All these sinners, washed in the Jordan river. And the Son of God approaches.

John knows who He is. He knows that Jesus has no sin to repent of, no sins to wash away, no need for what John provides. John knows who Jesus is, knows how odd it is for the Lord Christ to align Himself with sinners. And that is precisely what Jesus is doing. Do you believe that

Jesus is aligned with you, is pleased to call you His brother, His sister? Look at where He goes for you. He goes into that water. The refuse of humanity is in that water. That is precisely where Jesus intends to go; it's why He came, why He was born of the Virgin, why He took up our flesh and bone... to go into that water. Why did Jesus come? To save us? Oh yes, to save us. What does that mean? He's got to bear our sin. God is just. Your sin must be paid for; yours and the whole world over. That water – it was where Jesus began His public ministry. To stand in the place of the whole world, to be infused with every vice, every failure, every disease, every gesture of hate and all unbelief and death itself. In that water... that's where it begins.

He is baptized – to begin shouldering the weight of the sin of the world. It is a reversal. He takes what is ours – pride, lust, greed, deceit, drunkenness, adultery, covetousness and death. He gives what is His – righteousness, fidelity, truthfulness, selflessness, integrity, purity, devotion to His Father, divine love, divine holiness, divine life. That is what He gives to the water. His death and resurrection – that is in the water of your baptism. His blood, rosy red and springing with Easter, that is in the water of your baptism. God has put it there, located it there, to wash you in Christ's sacrifice, to cleanse you and make you pristine, holy. He is a God of His Word. There is a basis for your trust, your unqualified reliance upon Him to save you, to bless you, to bring you to heaven.

There is a sequence to follow, a seamless sequence that flows from Jesus in the Jordan and comes to rest in you. The Holy Spirit, the third person of the Trinity – Jesus receives the Spirit at His baptism. The Spirit that Jesus receives at His baptism, He gives up in death. The Spirit that Jesus gives up in death He pours out on the church at Pentecost. The Spirit Jesus poured out on the church at Pentecost He gave to you when you were baptized. You have been united to the crucified and risen King. In His death – united. The old man in you was crucified with Christ. United with Him – not a spectator, a participant in Christ's death. Not kept far from you – Jesus and His blood – brought into your very being. That is what God has done, in you. The Lord Christ's resurrection – united. Raised a new creation, you walk in newness of life. That is what God has done, in you. Your sin? It is removed, taken away, buried with Christ. The Holy Spirit brings you all this treasure, all this life, all this divine goodness.

Why, then, (Why!?) do we return to old things, the old life, the selfish path, the faithless heart, the petty vindictiveness, the empty habits, the vain agenda, the world's corruption? Why? Are we unaware of God's love? Are we cold-hearted villains who prefer darkness to light? Why? Your sin is a choice. No one puts a gun to your head to do the ugly things you do – lie, gossip, putting yourself above others, extracting a price from anyone who doesn't kiss your feet.

Newness of life – that is the Christian way. Newness of life – it is Christ's life, in you. There is a basis for you to trust this. Your baptism was a saving event. All of Christ's righteousness was allocated to you, all of it washed over you, all of it was placed in you. In you, the death of God's Son which was pure love, an atoning work of eternal power. United with Him in a death like His, life is yours. God will never deny you, never break His promise, never undo His Word. Your place in this holy house is a guarantee of your place at the Father's table in heaven. You are a delight to Him, precious in His sight, and He looks out for you – giving you all that you need for this body and life. Trust – newness of life is paved with trust for your Savior.

These words are for you: “But now thus says the Lord, he who created you, O Jacob, he who formed you, O Israel: ‘Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned and the flame shall not consume you’” (Isaiah 43:1-2). He is a God of His Word. What was begun at Jesus’ baptism in the Jordan was completed when He died on the Holy Cross. That is the basis for our trust. All of God’s promises are fulfilled in Christ. He is the Word made flesh. He is God’s living promise. He is your Savior.