

Rev. Zach Moffatt  
Adams UMC  
Baptism of Our Lord Sunday  
January 12<sup>th</sup>, 2020

***Baptized!***

Matthew 3:13-17

*Focus: It's all about grace!*

*Function: The function of this sermon is to teach about our understanding of baptism.*

Will you pray with me and for me: Gracious God, you call us your children—even before you knew your name, you called us yours. Remind us of that identity. Remind us that there is no one or nothing which can remove us from your vast and holy love. May the meditations of our hearts and the words of my lips be acceptable and pleasing in thy sight, oh God, our strength and our redeemer. Speak, Lord Jesus, for your servants are listening.

IN THE NAME OF THE CREATOR, AND OF THE REDEEMER, AND OF THE SUSTAINER, AMEN.

**John the Baptizer is one of the most interesting characters in the New Testament.** He doesn't have a role that is out in the front like Peter or Paul in the story of Jesus—but, he has one of the most important pieces in the story of salvation. While our text this morning isn't long—and on the surface it doesn't seem like much is happening, when we dig deep, we can see a lot is going on.

**As many of us know, John the Baptizer is the cousin of Christ.** Being an outsider of the happenings of Judea and Jerusalem, he lived in the desert. At locusts and wild honey. And, lived fully into his calling to prepare the way of the coming of Christ. Announcing for all to hear, "Prepare the way for the coming of the Lord. The Kingdom of Heaven is coming near!" As people heard him preach, they would come to the Jordan River to be baptized. Baptism isn't solely a Christian ritual. In fact, before John's appearance on the scene in Jerusalem, Jewish folks who felt a powerful religious experience would go to the Jordan River with a teacher or pharisee and be submersed in the water as a symbol of God's cleansing and saving grace. So, it isn't surprising that folks would come after hearing John's call of repentance that they would respond the way they did. John that Baptizer preached a message of repentance and upon hearing that message, folks would come to the Jordan River and John would baptize them.

**But, what is surprising is that Jesus shows up on the scene.** The last time we saw Jesus in the gospel of Matthew, he and his family were returning to Galilee from Egypt—having stayed there as refugees waiting until it was safe to return because of Herod's horrific and vile decree. And, the next we see Jesus—he is leaving Galilee heading to the Jordan River so that John the Baptizer will baptize him. Even John recognizes the surprising nature of Christ's visit. He tries to stop Christ by saying, "I need to be baptized by you, yet you come to me for baptism?"

**Many of us grew up with the understanding that baptism is solely about the removal of sins.** Even in our United Methodist Church—that lining of thinking gets promoted. But, if baptism is solely about the removal of sins—why would Jesus need to get baptized? Why would the only person who walked this earth without sin go through a ritual of cleansing oneself from sin? What gives? I mean, no one is forcing Christ to do this. He willingly goes to the Jordan River so that John could baptize him. He even says that is necessary in order to fulfill all righteousness. So, John agrees and baptizes the Son of God. And as he comes out of the water, a voice from heaven declares, “This is my Son whom I dearly love; I find happiness in him.”

**Friends, the point of baptism isn’t solely about the removal of sins.** If that were all it was about—then we would need to come to the waters after every day. And, baptism is more than just a symbol of our decision to follow Christ. The story of Jesus’ baptism shows us that baptism is all about the grace of God. In baptism we are reminded of what our true identity is and where it lies. Just as God announced God’s love for Christ when he came to the waters—so too does God announce God’s love for us when we come to the waters. But notice what God says when Jesus comes—“This is my Son whom I dearly love...” God’s announcement isn’t about a new love—it is about a love that has already existed since the beginning of time. So too when we come to the waters, the announcement God makes isn’t about a new love for us—but it’s an announcement about God’s love which has been poured over us before we even knew of God’s presence in our lives. Baptism is all about God’s holy grace—which God has gifted to us from the moment we took our first breath.

**Baptism isn’t just about sin—it is about love.** It is about God’s love for you and for me. It is about what our identity entails. Our identity is God’s children in whom God delights and God loves. Friends, found in baptism is God’s holy grace—which does remove our sins. But baptism is about so much more. It is about God’s claim on our lives. Jesus got in that water even though he was sinless—to show us that God’s love flows through us despite our own sinfulness. Despite our past mistakes, despite our shame, despite our hardship, despite our pain, despite our brokenness, God calls us God’s own dearly beloved. Found in baptism we see God’s prevenient grace which claims us even before we know about God’s presence in our lives. Found in baptism we see God’s justifying grace which heals us of our brokenness and sin. Found in baptism we see God’s sanctifying grace which leads us to a live a life full of love and mercy, a life where we serve others, a life where we perfectly love God and our neighbor in all that we do.

**Baptism is all about grace—it’s all about God claiming us in the midst of our pain and brokenness.** Some of you may have heard this story before—but I think it reminds us of this powerful truth—when we are baptized, we remember we are God’s holy children. As many of you know for a brief moment, I worked as a chaplain at Northside Hospital while Kara and I lived in Atlanta. One Sunday, I was on call and since it was the weekend, I was the only chaplain present. The triage phone rang, and it was the NICU charge nurse telling me that a 24-week-old baby had coded and they didn’t think he was going to make it. As I enter the NICU, I see a group huddled around a mom, dad, and grandmother. Tears rushing down their face, they tell

me they are Catholic and would like a priest to come and baptize their child. I told them I would be more than happy to call a priest, but it would be later that evening as it was Sunday and Mass was going on. Then I told them that if they wanted, I would be more than honored to baptize their child. They shook their heads yes. And then, something spoke to me, and I know it was the Spirit of God. In the NICU at Northside, there was a balcony where parents could go to get some fresh air. It was one of the only cool days in Atlanta during the summer—with a nice breeze blowing that day. I asked if they would like to do the baptism outside in the fresh air and they agreed. A nurse gave me a bottle of sterile water, I blessed the water, and as I was about to baptize this child—the entire NICU staff came outside to surround this family with love and grace. We then baptized this child, with tears rushing down our faces.

**Today, remember your baptism.** And, if you can't literally remember it—remember what it means. You are God's child—claimed by God. And, when we come to the waters, we publicly acknowledge that we are God's—and in all our power, we will strive to live according to God's grace. You are baptized—a holy, beautiful, flawed, child of God.

IN THE NAME OF THE CREATOR, AND OF THE REDEEMER, AND OF THE SUSTAINER, AMEN.