

December 10, 2017
Second Sunday in Advent

“The Right Baptism”

Mark 1:1-8

Did you catch the dynamic going on in our Gospel reading today? A stark difference is being highlighted between the baptism of John and the baptism of Jesus.

The text says this, “*John appeared, baptizing in the wilderness and proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins*” and then quotes John as saying, “*After me comes he who is mightier than I, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. I have baptized you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.*”

John’s baptism is not a bad baptism, but it can’t compare to that of Jesus. John’s baptism is one absent the Holy Spirit of God. What’s the difference? Well I’m sure that question has been tossed around by biblical scholars throughout the ages. But one simple difference is clear. John’s baptism happens prior to the advent of Christ’s perfect life, death and resurrection. The baptism Christ commands comes after.

John’s baptism is clearly preparatory, meaning it is a baptism done in anticipation of the Messiah, of the reign of God’s Christ breaking into human history. The very act of undergoing this baptism is the admission of one’s sins and repentance, turning away from those sins.

The baptism commanded by Christ, which St. Paul makes clear is a baptism into Christ, is much more. It is a work of the Holy Spirit, bringing you each day through Christ’s death to sin and resurrection to the Father and perfect life forever.

But my purpose here isn’t to wrangle with all the scholarly theories and theological nuances of these two baptisms. We could do that in Bible studies for days. What I’d like us to do is to examine ourselves in light of these baptisms. When John baptizes Christ, it is the beginning of His salvific ministry which ushered in the End Times—the age in which you and I now live! But despite all we know of Christ, I see lots of us, maybe all of us at one time or another, living in the wrong baptism.

What I mean is this: while God worked in John’s baptism, and I have no reason to believe those baptized by John were not forgiven, for it was a baptism of repentance leaning on faith in the promises of God, but those people walked away from that baptism expecting God to do something more. And I’m sure many were wondering what more they had to do to inherit the kingdom of God. I don’t want to say that baptism was incomplete, but it certainly left people in expectation and anticipation of what was next...the salvation yet to come.

You and I have received the baptism into Christ. But I think a lot of us do, or have in the past, expected more salvation, more Jesus, to come.

Perhaps you’ve had a “spiritually high” time in your life when all seemed right with God and your heart was bursting with faith, hope, love and eagerness to do His work. Yet time and life has knocked the wind out of your sails. Now you’re doing the faith thing, coming here to worship as you should, but you’re kind of looking to God saying, “What’s next? When are you going to do something with me?” You want the feeling of passion and direction, but what you’ve got is...Monday.

Or maybe it’s that you’re finishing a phase of life; done with school and heading into the workforce, or you’ve served God as Dad or Mom but now the kids have moved out and on, or you’ve finished a career and dealing with retirement, or even, you’ve lived life and now your body is declining toward its demise. “Now what God? Show me. Do something.” You come

here. You repent of your sins. You receive absolution and you know that forgiveness is complete. But you're still looking and hoping for something more, as if God has yet to act.

And possibly, your spiritual life is little more than repentance—the constant focus on your sins, because your sins are continually right there in front of your face. So, repentance is what it's all about. That's John's baptism. It's good. Repentance is good. It's faith. But it is not realizing the fullness of the baptism that you have actually received—the baptism into Jesus!

By the power of God's Holy Spirit, you are not just you in your earthly life today mired in sin waiting for something more. True, we do await the return of Christ in glory and that unimaginably wonderful eternity that day will usher in for us. But you have been baptized through this life and its death and into resurrection already! You are part of the risen, reigning Jesus the very day!

The first words of Jesus in this Gospel of Mark are not only "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent!" The first proclamation of Jesus is, "*The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.*" The Gospel is this: All that needs to be done to make you right before God and a citizen of His kingdom for all eternity has been done and done perfectly in Christ. No matter what the devil, the world, or those doubting voices deep inside of you say, Christ reigns in you and over you now and forever!

It's true, we'd all love a perfect vision of where exactly God wants us, what he wants us to do, and to be filled with a zeal and passion to carry it out. But if you're just living life facing what pops up in front of you each day trying to face it in love of God and neighbor to God's glory, it's eternal life in Christ, because the Holy Spirit baptized you into the kingdom. And you know what? If you've schlepped through this week absent of a thought about God and falling into evil sin left and right, but you're here today in repentance, by virtue of Christ's baptism you stand forgiven and holy in the kingdom and have reason for great joy.

I know we'd all love to know how each trial or suffering we face is the working out of God's eternal plan for our salvation. But if we're clueless why life stinks so much it doesn't change the fact that it will give way to blessed eternity in the kingdom where all hardships will be eclipsed by supernal bliss.

And yes, death is bad and evil. We hate facing it as it afflicts us or those we love. But its badness cannot overcome its powerlessness in the face of the resurrection of Christ for you. You've been baptized through it in Christ and even though you die, yet shall you live; whoever lives and believes in Christ shall never die.

You don't live in John's baptism. It was good, but it was in expectation of the advent of Christ. Christ advented. He advented on the cross, through the tomb and to the right hand of the Father. In His baptism by the power of the Holy Spirit, you're already with Him there.

So brothers and sisters in Christ, don't let life get you down. Live in expectation, but in expectation of the reality you've already been given in your baptism into Jesus. You have life in the kingdom. No matter what this life before your face appears to be, your reality is Christ, today and forever.

Amen.