

We Are Baptized

By: Keith Holste

January 11, 2015. With baptism, we rely upon what God has done, rather than on what we think we have to do ourselves. Pastor Keith's message today is on the baptism of Jesus and what it means for us.

*** Transcript ***

If you do Facebook or Instagram or any of those kind of social media, you're always given the chance to "like" something, something that someone else has posted. Maybe it's what they say, or a situation they describe, or a picture that they put up and share. All these may lead you to "like" what they have done. You, of course, may be led to comment on the post as well. But the easiest way to let a person know that you've seen it and you appreciate it and find the image of what they say appealing is to "like" it.

In today's gospel, we hear God "like" something. After Jesus is baptized by John, God weighs in on the event and on Jesus. The Spirit comes down like a dove, the voice of God comes down and says, "You are my Son, the Beloved. With you I am well pleased." God likes this person. God likes this situation. But this is a little more than just a tap on a screen. This is not just to be liked, either. It is to be loved. Jesus is the Beloved. With him God is pleased. To be liked is something we normally all seek ourselves. When we're in grade school we like to be liked by the other kids. We whine when we're lonely and it seems like nobody cares about us, and we say, "Nobody likes me." We're pleased when we're liked by the other children. As adults we don't mind it either. We like to be liked by others. Maybe being popular isn't quite as important to us as it is in high school, when we're an adult. But we still like to be liked by others. When Sally Field won an Oscar a few years ago she said, "You like me! You really like me!" Desire to be liked by others is something that's powerful and deep with us. We want to be received by others.

At the baptism of Jesus, God testifies to how he loves Jesus, and is pleased with him. That's the grace that we find in our baptisms also. When that word is spoken over us, it is God saying to us, "You are my Beloved. With you I am well pleased." We may be surprised at that. We know that we don't always do what God wants us to do. We don't always say what God wants us to say. We don't always think what God wants us to think. How can it be that God would love us and be pleased with us? Well that's the promise that becomes ours, because Jesus went into the water himself. And because he was baptized just as we are (though he didn't need it for the washing away of his sins) because of what he did for us he said, I want to be human along with these other humans. He said, I am one of you. What will happen to me, Jesus said, will happen to you. Because he dies, we die to sin with him. Because he rises, we have the promise of new life too. God is pleased with us, because when God sees us, his love lets us see Jesus in us.

Well, if God hadn't wanted it this way God, would not have done it. But God liked us and loved us from the beginning and wants us to be friends with him. And as God liked us and loved us, so that as soon as we were created he made sure that there was a way we would find ourselves pleasing to him. So there's an assurance here that even though we may not always live as God's people, God wants us to be his. And he's provided this way so that we can be his, based on our faith in him. There's an assurance here. Otherwise, we'd worry all the time that it depends on me, and I need to be likable to God. You would worry that we have to have so much faith to make this thing happen. We would feel like we need to rely on our own faith in God. Do we have enough faith to believe, to satisfy God? But

at baptism the direction is reversed. Instead of us trying to go up to God, God comes down to us. The Spirit comes to us as the Spirit came to Jesus and works faith in us, so we don't have to rely on our own. God creates the faith. God gives the faith to us. It's a wonderful gift of God.

Martin Luther said that when he doubted, he would say to himself, "I'm baptized." He wouldn't say so much, "Well, I need to believe" or "I'm a Christian, so I oughta believe." He just said, "I'm baptized," because the strength of his faith was in his baptism. Because he knew God put God's claim on him when he was baptized. With baptism we rely upon what God has done, rather than on what we think we have to do ourselves. Baptism is relying on what God has done for us. We have the assurance therefore, through baptism, that we are the children of God and that we are filled with the Holy Spirit, even when it seems like so many signals are around us saying we're not really. So many signals come to us saying "you're a nobody." Baptism says to us, quoting God, "I am pleased with you."

When Jesus was baptized, God gave him the verbal assurance that he was indeed God's son. He could always know that the Spirit was with him. And Jesus would need these assurances, as he was tempted, while he was doing his ministry, and when he suffered and died. From his baptism, the next thing he did was go to the wilderness for 40 days where he was tempted. And he was sorely tempted not to follow through with God's Mission, and to take a more comfortable route. His baptism and God's words of assurance gave him the strength of faith to counter the devil and do what he needed to do.

The first thing Jesus did in his ministry after he called the disciples was to encounter a man possessed by demons. When he exorcised the demons from the man, then some of the people thought Jesus must be of the devil himself, if he did that. And that was just the start of all the naysayers, all the people who were against Jesus in his ministry -- always either out to get him, to dissuade him from doing things, always saying he must not be real, there's some other reasons these things are happening. So he needed the assurance during his ministry that he'd been baptized and endowed by the Spirit so that he indeed could carry on his own ministry. And when Jesus suffered on the cross, he was tempted yet again. By words of the people around him, the devil was tempting him to come down from the cross and prove himself, that he could do miracles. He didn't need to die. But yet even on the cross Jesus reached for the words of God and remembered the assurances that God had given him, going all the way back to his baptism so that he could withstand.

We may not have such dramatic encounters with those who would like to peel us away from our relationship with Jesus. But the difficulties of our lives can be temptations, to make us wonder. Doubts creep into our minds. Did Jesus really mean that he was the Son of God? Is that really who he was? Is he really connected to me? Could some person who lived back then have some connection to me? All kinds of doubts can come into our minds. Temptations can be there for us not to follow through when we know it's the right thing to do. We may have good intentions, but it gets really hard to do what we intend to do. Do we have enough sacrifice to do that? Maybe it is to help someone or to stand up for someone. We say, "Well, I don't know. Can I really do that?" It's a temptation not to do what we know we ought to do.

Hard times make us wonder too. Our own forms of death -- illnesses, loneliness, embarrassment -- all kinds of ways that we die little deaths make us wonder if we will live well. Is God there to help me through my hard time? Like Luther, we remember that we are baptized. The assurance is there, just as it was for Jesus. God says, you are my child, with whom I am well pleased. With the water of baptism, the Spirit has come down upon you. You have me with you in your doubt, in your temptations, and in your hard times. Trust me, God says. I've come down. I will stay with you. And it is the Spirit with a capital 'S' that comes to us in baptism as it did to Jesus. Just as the Spirit was sweeping over the waters

at creation, as our first lesson talked about today, the Spirit comes through the water of baptism for us. It comes to give us new life. The Spirit came with such power at the baptism of Jesus that it was like tearing the heavens open, we mentioned. It was a new creation. New things were beginning. It was the beginning of a new world with Jesus in it. So it is a new life that comes to us at baptism. We are a new creation. It's our second birth. We are revived from the sin we are born into, and given a new life with God.

With that new life, we create a new world around us, just as Jesus did. You live a new way, not captive to the standards and goals the world puts up around us, but responding to the kind of life that Jesus taught us that we should have. It's the life where we're ready to forgive. We're ready to help another person. We're ready to put ambition aside for the sake of being of service. We live the new life of Jesus as we are empowered and given this new life by the spirit of God.

So, we are liked and loved by God. We are assured by God. We are revived by God's spirit to live a new life. All of this comes through our baptism. It is a wonderful gift. A great thing happened on the day we were baptized. We began anew with God. We were given a pattern to go by, to live out this sometimes difficult way of life. But with the Spirit we are able to do it, knowing that we are ones who are liked by God. Amen.

And now may the peace of God which surpasses all human understanding keep our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

*** Keywords ***

2015, Christ Lutheran Church, Webster Groves, sermon, podcast, transcript, Pastor Keith Holste, Genesis 1:1-5, Mark 1:4-11