

The First Sunday after Epiphany

January 10, 2016

Prayer of the Day: Father in heaven, at the baptism of Jesus in the River Jordan you proclaimed him your beloved Son and anointed him with the Holy Spirit. Keep us who are baptized into Christ faithful in our calling as your children and make us heirs with him of everlasting life; through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Verse of the Day: Alleluia! You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased Alleluia! (Mark 1:11)

Sermon Text: Titus 3:4-7

Their vehicle glided through car-lined streets and past three-story townhomes. Husband and wife drove by schools and fire departments and parks. Signs named streets; big white arrows on the road navigated them; traffic lights marked intersections. They passed them all while looking for their turn.

Those car-lined streets gradually disappeared. Towering townhomes morphed into towering grain silos. Schools and fire departments transformed into big red barns. Parks became wide-open farm fields. Street signs and intersections vanished. Their destination was in the city, but they now found themselves out in the country.

Soon, the all-too-familiar question came out: "Honey, I think we're lost." His wife pointed at a nearby gas station and suggested asking the cashier for directions. "I don't need help. I can find our destination on my own," came the reply. So, they continued driving on.

The farm land grew more open and wider. Homes only dotted the landscape. Again came the all-too-familiar question: "Honey, I think we're lost." His wife swung out the road atlas to locate exactly where they were, but he quickly pushed the map away. "I don't need a map. I can find our destination on my own." They continued driving on.

Cattle farms gave way to wide-open natural parks. No more houses. No more barns. No more intersections. Just one straight road cutting through a thick forest. "Honey, I think we're lost." His wife turned on the GPS and began punching in the address of their destination, but he swatted the little computer away. "I don't need the GPS. I can find our destination on my own." They continued driving on.

You just want to scream: "Just stop already! You do not know where you are going! Just use your tools of advice or a map or a GPS! Stop relying on yourself!"

Titus 3:4-7

⁴ But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, ⁵ he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, ⁶ whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, ⁷ so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life.

That is not easy to remember, is it? And no, I am not necessarily talking about driving lost. Do you always remember the new life that is already yours through baptism? Do you wash away nagging, clinging, stubborn guilt in the waters of baptism? Do you live in the peaceful realm of knowing that God brings you into his heavenly family through baptism? Or is baptism considered as unnecessary as a gas station cashier or a map or a GPS?

This morning the apostle Paul reminds you how your baptism still fits into your Christian life. **REMEMBER YOUR BAPTISM!** *where God reveals his merciful love, where God pours out his blessings.*

Regardless of when you were baptized or what you remember about the day or where your faith-life has taken you in the years following your baptism, the apostle Paul breathes renewed life into your baptism.

He is writing to people like you and me, to believers who already trust in Jesus as their Savior. He reminds us just how God made us heirs of eternal life. **But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy.** Paul stresses that point: God has a kind and sincere interest in humanity. This is not a general and vague feeling of love, but rather a philanthropy-love. God loves human beings; he gives in order to benefit you. If you want proof of God's love for human beings, then look to the virgin's human child lying in the manger. Jesus' birth is no coincidence; it is not accidental. At just the right time God the Father chooses to bring his only Son into your world so that he can save you.

Paul makes it abundantly clear why God does all of this. He literally says [in the Greek]: **"[We are saved] not from works, those which we, we ourselves did in righteousness..."** We did not behave so well in society that we were able to save up our good deeds (like UPC barcodes or labels) and when we reached a certain amount, God would send down Jesus. We did not make a good, upright, righteous decision to choose that Jesus would benefit us—and so we asked God to send him down. Nor did we make a personal decision to invite Jesus into our hearts as our personal Lord and Savior. Neither are we such cute, loveable people that God had no choice but to love us. No, Paul clearly explains that we had absolutely no part in Jesus' saving work.

Why does God save us? The cause, the reason is quite clear: **[God] saved us... because of his mercy.** God looked down from heaven and saw how truly lost his creation was. Sin infected the world; it enslaved us to serve only ourselves and to reject God's every good word ([Titus 3:3](#)). The reason to send Jesus originates in the heart of God. He sends Jesus into your world because he loves you. Here you see the perfect God-man take on flesh, brace against the same temptations you and I face, and still stand clean from all sin. No harsh words are ever found in his mouth. No jealous thoughts ever flood his mind. His entire life selflessly beats for you.

That is why you see him standing in the Jordan River today. Jesus is baptized, not because he has sin to remove, but rather to be the righteousness God requires from you ([Matthew 3:14-15](#)). The same water is applied to him as it is on us. The Triune God

appears and the Father announces his approval of Jesus' life. At our baptism, the Triune God—the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit— announces his grace applied to us.

Paul says that: **He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit...** That word “washing” describes something more than taking a bath to get clean. God uses that word “washing” to explain what he does for you in the waters of baptism. Just like people use a map or a GPS device to navigate driving, God put Jesus' perfect life on you with the tool (or instrument) of baptism.

Yes, the water in baptism is just plain water, but God attaches a promise to this water. Because God attaches a promise to the water, it makes baptism more than just mere, plain old water. God's promise makes baptism something he gives to you and not something that you are doing or committing to him. When you were baptized (or when you bring your child to be baptized), God dresses you in the pure, blameless life of Jesus.

Yes, we will face the temptation to consider baptism as just another part of our Christian life— something that holds no significance. We will be tempted to believe that God really does nothing in baptism or that baptism is something we are doing for God. Yet, Paul cannot make it any clearer: God uses baptism to save us.

Sometimes you may feel that nagging, clinging, stubborn guilt stick to your mind. Sometimes you remember the harsh words spoken to your spouse, the times frustration spilled into angry outbursts— and you watched as your words plunged deep into their heart. Your mind locks in secrets which would only destroy you if anyone else knew. As many unrighteous deeds flood your mind, **REMEMBER YOUR BAPTISM.** See *where God reveals his merciful love.*

There at the waters God washes a guilty conscience clean. He purifies you from every scarlet sinful stain. He wraps you in the perfection of Jesus. **REMEMBER YOUR BAPTISM!** *where God reveals his merciful love.*

Your baptism is not important only when you are born or when you are baptized as an adult; it is not a one-time event which carries no lasting significance today. Instead, each day you **REMEMBER YOUR BAPTISM!** *where God pours out his blessings.*

The apostle Paul lists those out for you. Baptism is a **washing of rebirth.** God the Holy Spirit creates faith in baptism. He changes you from being an enemy of God to a child of God. Notice, we did not make a choice to leave one way of life and commit ourselves to another way of living. If it was our choice, our decision— or if baptism is our statement of committing ourselves to God— then we are describing a different baptism than what God talks about here. God the Holy Spirit works through those waters. He creates faith where faith was not present before. He attaches Jesus' saving work to you. He changes self-serving hearts to hearts which gladly listen to God's Word. You have a new mind, a new man who loves hearing God's Word and desires to live life according to his Word.

Right now you are a child of God; God has made you that. Yes, you know that life is not perfect, nor have you become perfectly sinless. Many times you may be all-too-aware of your many faults. Yet, you have a **baptism of renewal.** That means God uses his Word to speak to you. He points you to the cross where your forgiveness is won. He brings you to these waters where he has washed away your every fault.

As you hear God's comforting, reassuring forgiveness, your conscience is put at ease. Your mind grows more centered on the things of God—not because you and I are making the effort. No, we love our God more and more because God first loved us ([1 John 4:19](#)).

That is what you see at baptism. God pours out the Holy Spirit **on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life.** As the water passes over you, God only reminds you more and more that you are an heir of eternal life. All doubts about this fact are washed away; any fears are drowned. You can repeatedly look to this washing act and know that God has opened heaven for you. That is the result. You have “hope” for life eternal. This is not a double-minded hope. Rather, it is a sure trust in something that is not yet seen. Heaven is our “hope.” You know it is there and you know it is yours because God has written you into his will.

As you wait for that heavenly day, your baptism reminds you who you are now. You are connected to God. You confidently know your loving God is with you. For those times you feel lonely, then look to the cross to see a Companion. For those times God appears absent in your world, then look to the manger and see a Friend. For those times you feel abandoned, then look at the Living Word. Jesus continues speaking about the Father's love for you. By the Holy Spirit's power you accept his Words as truth. **REMEMBER YOUR BAPTISM!** *where God pours out his blessings.*

You may not be driving through city-streets and country roads. You may stop to ask for directions the minute you are lost. You may use a map or GPS device to navigate your path. You use the tools you have for comfort and guidance.

The same is true about baptism. It is not a simple, one-time act which carries no lasting significance. It is not us committing ourselves to God; God commits himself to us. **REMEMBER YOUR BAPTISM** and see God's merciful love poured out on you. See him wash away your sin. Watch him clothe you in Jesus' white robe of perfection. See that you remain his.

REMEMBER YOUR BAPTISM and recall the many blessings God gives you. Nagging, clinging, stubborn guilt are removed. In its place comes a heart and mind which rejoices at listening to God. Continue living in the peaceful realm of knowing that God brings us into his heavenly family through baptism.

That is what you hear this morning. The apostle Paul reminds you how your baptism still fits into your Christian life. **REMEMBER YOUR BAPTISM!** *where God reveals his merciful love, where God pours out his blessings.*