

¹³Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan, to be baptized by him. ¹⁴But John tried to stop him, saying, “I need to be baptized by you, and yet you come to me?”

¹⁵Jesus answered him, “Allow it for now, because this is the way for us to fulfill all righteousness.” Then John allowed him to be baptized.

¹⁶When Jesus was baptized, he went up immediately from the water. The heavens suddenly opened for him,^[a] and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming down on him. ¹⁷And a voice from heaven said: “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well-pleased.”

Baptism

The Old Pinal county courthouse in Arizona says its 11:44 no matter what time of day it is. This clock has been right twice a day for over a hundred years. It has been stuck on 11:44 ever since the day the building was opened in 1891, which is good news for workers during the day because it means it’s almost always time for lunch, but it’s also bad news for workers because it means it’s almost always time for lunch and yet it’s never lunch.

One might ask, “What’s the point of putting a broken clock up there in the first place? (Especially on a building that is supposed to stand for truth and justice) or, “Why would you ever do such a thing? Why even bother if it doesn’t work because the whole point to a clock is so people can tell what time it is but this? It just doesn’t make sense and you’re right.

Maybe you’ve run across something that just doesn’t make sense. This morning we run across another. Jesus comes to John to be baptized in the Jordan River, leaving John with a number of questions, one being, “Why? Why does the sinless son of God need to be baptized?” Baptizing Jesus with John’s baptism, “*A baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins*” (Mark 1:4) makes about as much sense as a clock that doesn’t work...

Why baptize when it doesn’t make sense?

John has been baptizing. His ministry started in advance to Jesus. He’s the older cousin. He’s the one preparing the way for the Lord. In Advent we heard John’s fiery preaching, “Every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire.” John called out to the Pharisees, “You brood of vipers, who warned you? Produce fruit in keeping with repentance.” John’s job was to prepare hearts for the Lord. He preached repentance and baptism. John was calling for a drastic change to turn away from sin and turn toward God. What he was calling for was conversion. Then Jesus comes to be baptized by John, a baptism of repentance.

Confusing? John spoke about the one greater than him, one of whom he is unworthy to perform even the most menial task of taking hold of his shoes, loosening sandal straps, the one who would baptize with the Holy Spirit and with fire, and then Jesus comes to be baptized by John. *And John tried to prevent him saying, “I need to be baptized by you, and yet you come to me.”* Are you confused?

John is confused. John leapt in the womb when he heard the voice of Mary. John knew that Jesus was someone special. Jesus is the sinless son of the Virgin Mary, he had no sinful nature. He lived a perfect life in obedience to his Father’s will. He had no need to repent. Why baptism? Why this? John repeatedly tried to turn Jesus away. He kept at it. He didn’t understand the point or the purpose. In fact if anything it made it look like Jesus wasn’t all special. It sent a message that he was a sinner and not the spotless Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. Jesus had no sin, there was no reason for him to be baptized, but he says, “Let it be so now, it is proper for us to fulfill all righteousness.” Jesus explains why he had to be baptized.

To fulfill all righteousness - this is the righteousness spoken of in the Old Testament. This is God’s righteousness that refers to the work of the Lord on behalf of his people. This is the fulfillment of the promises of God. With John’s participation, Jesus will fulfill “all righteousness,” that is, he will enact God’s saving work for the people by standing with sinners, taking their place, receiving the same baptism from John that sinners receive.

Jesus came to fulfill all righteousness and the importance of this event is that Jesus is taking his stand, putting his lot in with sinners. Filling full his life with the righteousness that God demands for those who have failed to fulfill the righteous demands of God. Instead of fulfilling the law we’ve been filling full our lives with any and everything less than perfection. Jesus says Matthew 5:48, “*Be perfect as my father in heaven is perfect.*” In fact we may

even be confused about our own baptism and assume that once we are baptized that is all we have to do. Once God's Word is connected with the water that's that I'm done, salvation assured, I'm baptized I can go live my life for myself, no works, nothing, I don't even have to set foot in the church or build up my brothers and sisters in Christ. I don't need to train a child in the way he should go... nothing more.

Because of this, many have labeled Lutherans as lazy in living out their lives of faith. Lutherans are accused of forgiving sin where there is no repentance, of allowing such magical means of water, bread, and wine and saying, "Your sins are forgiven, live as you please." That's not living your life in Christ. That isn't making use of your baptism, that's abusing your baptism. If that is how you are living, I don't think I would call that Lutheran and I'm not even sure I would call that Christian. If anything, one who believes they can live however they please after baptism certainly are struggling in their faith. Paul writes in Romans 6, "Should we continue in sin so that grace may abound? By no means! We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?"

When you were baptized you died with Christ. Sin was put to death and you were raised to life. What could be any more confusing than a Christian who doesn't want to serve his Lord and Savior? That's more confusing than a clock that doesn't work or a sinless son of God stepping forward for baptism for repentance. Your sinful nature is put to death and you are raised to life in Christ Jesus. Paul continues, "We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death and in order that just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life."

The only words that I can say to a "Christian" comfortable in sin are words of the law. "*Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already*" (Mark 16:16). So if you think you can continue living as you please, ignoring God's commands, in un-repentance – then you should be concerned because you need Jesus more than you know.

God has given each of us a box that he expects to find full of righteousness when we die. Anything less than full, anything less than perfection is unacceptable. That is also the reason why Jesus had to be baptized, to fulfill all righteousness to fill full our box and clothe us in Christ.

John consented and Jesus was baptized like any other sinner but that wasn't the only thing that occurred that day. Instead of doubt and confusion we find something more dramatic. BEHOLD "The heavens were opened to him and he saw the Spirit of God descend as a dove and come upon him." And BEHOLD a voice from heaven saying, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased." The voice of Isaiah, "I will put my Spirit on him." Fulfilled and more than that. This voice from heaven proclaimed for all to hear that this one, Jesus, is Emmanuel, God with us, the Son of God, The LORD – the one who fulfills the prophecy. Jesus was taking up his role and standing with sinners. He is giving us his perfect life and serving as our mediator between God and man. His anointing marks him for a special purpose.

Just like a priest in the OT who was anointed and set aside for service. Jesus too is anointed by God. Jesus by coming to be baptized is stating, "I have come into this world to take the place of sinners." This was his work. He is anointed to serve and not only that but he is also affirmed. The voice came down from heaven, "This is my son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased." These words weren't spoken to Jesus, "You are my son." These words were spoken to those around Jesus, a public proclamation of his position as well as his approval. God came down. He humbled himself to receive a sinners baptism for sin he didn't have. He came down to the piddly little Jordan river which means – the descender, a river that leads to the dead sea. And his life from this point forward would lead down to the cross, down to the grave, having accomplished his mission of fulfilling all righteousness he rose from the dead.

Paul says in 2 Cor 5:21 says that "*God made Him who knew no sin to be sin for me so that we could become the righteousness of God in Him.*" That's what was going on. That's how we should view our baptism. When we are forgiven, we don't go back to a blank slate, we are filled full of Jesus' righteousness. Everything God expects of us, Jesus did and that's given to us in Baptism. God's Work for us so that we can be sure and certain that as surely as I

am alive and part of this world, if I have been baptized I am a child of God, clothed in Christ. You receive the same approval, “This is my son, whom I love.”

How can we use this wonderful gift of God? Why baptism? When tempted confess, “I am baptized. I am a child of God. I’ve died to sin. I’ve been clothed in Christ.” Is the devil accusing you, rubbing your face in your sin, confess, “I’m baptized. I’m a child of God. When down and out remember, “I’m baptized. I’m a child of God. God has placed his name on me and will take me home to be with him.” Fallen into sin, offended a brother or sister then repent because you are baptized.

How can water do such great things? First off, water can do amazing things. I hear it has carved a Grand Canyon somewhere. Second, it’s not the water that does such great things even my kids and dog know that. It’s the promise connecting us to Christ and his death on the cross. Third, it’s the command of God that we go and make disciples baptizing all nations. So why baptism? Because God loves us and wants to tell us in more than one way. He reminds us of his gift, the life of his son, his righteousness, his perfect life. His baptism reminds us that he stood with sinners even when it didn’t make much sense, even when there was nothing he would gain out of this deal, he stood by us. You’re sins are forgiven. You are clothed in Christ and can live as a Christian.

Make sense? So much more than a clock on a courthouse that reads the wrong time. Why? Because they really wanted a clock but couldn’t afford one. Why baptism? So Jesus could take his place next to you. The Father and the Holy Spirit rejoice as the Son associates with sinners to fulfill all righteousness and open heaven to you, so you can live by faith and hold on to something – Jesus death, his baptism that connects you to his death and his life,