

You are Loved!

King of Glory Lutheran Church

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**Matthew 3:13-17**

<sup>13</sup>Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan, to be baptized by him. <sup>14</sup>John would have prevented him, saying, “I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?” <sup>15</sup>But Jesus answered him, “Let it be so now; for it is proper for us in this way to fulfill all righteousness.” Then he consented. <sup>16</sup>And when Jesus had been baptized, just as he came up from the water, suddenly the heavens were opened to him and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him. <sup>17</sup>And a voice from heaven said, “This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased.”

*Jesus began his ministry knowing He was loved. We are loved. God's grace cannot be undone. This watery act defines who we are and calls us into what we can be.*

Beloved of God, hear those words. Beloved of God. I used to begin each sermon with a different Biblical phrase, but lately, I've been changing it up. This is because I don't want anyone to walk out those doors, not hearing 'God loves you', each and every weekend. I love the topic of Baptism and if there was a sermon I could preach multiple times a year, it would be on Baptism.

Therefore beloved of God, last weekend we heard the text of Mary and Joseph naming their child, Jesus. Now, some 30 years later in terms of the Biblical texts, we hear of Jesus being baptized.

Jesus' baptism was a one-time event, which took place prior to his ministry. In being baptized, He begins God's mission for Himself on earth hearing the words, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.” In the short two-year span of His ministry, there would come many a challenging moment, even for our Lord. Yet, Jesus knows...God loves Him. It was a defining moment.

Baptism is a defining moment for all of us. Washed in that liquid grace, God claims us, forgives us and promises to love us for all of eternity. Many, many events, our families of origin, our education and life experiences will have their defining moments upon our lives. Those are all important! Yet, underlying them

all, and more important than all, is God's washing of grace upon our souls and bodies.

I've told you this story before, yet good stories deserve to be retold. I was standing near a baptismal font which was quite large, a clear plastic bowl. It held several gallons of water, in a minimal wooden frame. A young girl had just crawled underneath the bowl and had pressed her face to its round surface. I peered over to look at her and seeing me, she began to laugh and wave at me. Both of our faces were distorted because of the water between us, but it was a beautiful symbol of how God sees us.

In baptism, God sees us through those waters of grace and love. Period. No matter where our lives take us, no matter what choices we make for good or ill, no matter how we think we've distorted God's mercy and squandered God's grace; God is like that little girl peering at me and me at her, through a holy washing of forgiveness and love. One defining moment that supersedes all other defining moments.

The challenge, I believe for all of us living in this post-modern age, is to allow God's love to be that one and defining factor in our lives.

In the book, "The Secret of Our Baptism," author Heather Elkins relates the story of a participant at a clergy retreat who shared the name for himself he has heard since childhood: "Not Good Enough."

How many of us have held onto a belief that before others and particularly before God, we too, are named, 'Not Good Enough.' Maybe your name is 'No Grace for Me'. Perhaps it is, 'Unforgiveable.' Take a moment and think if you have a name like this pastor had, as well.

There is a basic misunderstanding about ourselves that we bring to the baptismal font and frankly our life with God. We believe that the Sacrament about baptism and frankly our life before God is all about us. What we've done wrong. That we don't and can't and won't ever measure up. Call it Lutheran guilt, call it poor theology, call it what you wish.

Here's the truth about the baptismal font. It's all about God! Baptism isn't about what we do, it is all about who God makes us. Listen again, baptism isn't about what we do – our actions and behaviors, right or wrong. Baptism is about who we

are in God. Said another way, baptism is about God choosing us, putting such a powerful claim upon our lives, it can never be undone.

God claimed Jesus for who He was. “This is my beloved Son! With Him I am well pleased!” Jesus hadn’t healed anyone yet, hadn’t been tempted in the wilderness, hadn’t begun ministry. Yet through His baptism, Jesus knew that God loved Him, because they were in relationship. God does the choosing.

Beloved daughter of God! Beloved son of God! Beloved children of God. All of us! Not because of what we do, because of who God makes us to be. Beloved. Period. If beloved is too difficult to hear, try this one on for size. God likes you a whole bunch. God gets to choose and God chooses you. As the popular saying goes, God has a photo of you on God’s refrigerator.

Martin Luther wrote prolifically on many topics. He wrote about baptism. And it was no wonder so. Given that His own church had rejected his teachings, named him a heretic of the faith and put him on a run for his very own life, we can imagine Luther wondering if his life was all for naught. But two words were written in chalk upon his table. In Latin, ‘baptizatus sum’. ‘I am baptized.’

Not only that, but Luther specifically connected God’s work in Holy Baptism to faith in Jesus Christ. Lutheran theologian Carl Braaten quotes Luther: “Behold, I am baptized, and I believe in Christ crucified.”

(<https://bredenhof.ca/2017/01/26/luther-baptizatus-sum-i-am-baptized/> source not noted)

Not only are we chosen and claimed and washed and forgiven by almighty God, we are so, through the life and death of our Lord, Jesus Christ. Yes, we are baptized, but more important than our baptisms, are what Christ has done for us.

Say this after me, “I am a child of God marked by love forever.” Knowing this profound truth, believing this profound truth, can change everything we do in life. We approach disease or illness, trusting God’s daily and ultimate love for us. We live our relationships while also walking in the greatest relationship of all, beloved of God. We make mistakes and we can let them go, knowing through baptism, we are washed in forgiveness and grace.

Before you leave church today, walk by the font and remember your baptism, with a forehead full of wet grace in the sign of the cross. Amen!