

Today we'll be talking about the proper way. But first let's look at some baptisms that don't seem quite so proper.

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Jesus tells John the Baptist that his baptism is proper. But this baptism of Jesus. It should raise some questions. John the Baptist's message was one of repentance. Earlier in this chapter, John offered people a way in which they could seek repentance and receive forgiveness. It was through baptism.

John lived his message. Not only by his words but by how he lived his life. He lived in the wilderness. He wore clothes made of camel's hair with a leather belt around his waist. He ate locusts and wild honey.

His message struck right at the heart of the people who heard it. People who were confronted with a choice, a decision they just knew had to make. People who knew they had slipped far away from God's way. John was telling them something they already knew. Turn around, repent, and start again.

And then we have Jesus. Jesus who is sinless. So, if he is sinless, which we believe he is, then why would he need a baptism for of repentance. Jesus was sinless. He didn't need to repent. He didn't need to receive forgiveness.

Which is why John was downright startled when Jesus approached him and asked to be baptized. John recovered quickly from his shock and tries to discourage Jesus from getting baptized by him. After all, it was John, not Jesus who needed to be baptized. Why was Jesus coming to John to be baptized?

I have some thoughts. First, this the baptism of Jesus would be a revelation to everyone of who he really is. With this baptism, God the Father loudly proclaims that Jesus is the Son of God, the Messiah, the one long promised. The one longed for. The one hoped for. The one to fulfil all

hopes and all dreams. In a very real, very public, very obvious, very personal and very intimate way God pronounces Jesus as his Son.

Baptism stories also appear in Mark and Luke. They stress a very personal baptism. Not Matthew. He wants us to see Jesus' baptism as a demonstration of who Jesus is. In Matthew God says 'This is my son.' God telling the whole world who Jesus is. In Mark and Luke's gospel God says, 'You are my Son'. This is a personal and intimate revelation.

In the baptism of Jesus we get private disclosure of Jesus' identity AND a public testimony to him. God speaks to us in the same way, reminding us that we are his beloved children. God loves us, cares for us, holds us in his loving arms and never lets us go. God knows us.

Today with online banking, you need things like passwords and four-digit codes. If you call to ask about a hospital or utility bill, they usually start by asking for your account number. Who I am as a person is not important in these interactions. I'm merely a number, not a name. In this world where we are seen as numbers it more important than ever to remember that God knows each one of us through and through. Calls us by name and not by numbers. The very hairs of our head are numbered. God loves us and cares about us. We are special to God. You are special to God. Who is special to God?

Don't you think this is something that the many hurting people in our world today need to know? Our communities today, our neighborhoods, and our church. So many people needing to know that someone cares, someone loves them. And guess what? We have the good news of God's love in Jesus.

Next, the baptism of Jesus shows how much he identifies with us in this life. In a newspaper a while ago there was a picture of a young man sitting on some school steps. He was bald, and around him were his classmates, about 25 of them, their heads bowed towards the camera - and they too were bald.

The headline read: True Blue Pals and the caption said: Mark Busse, 16, poses with classmates from his high school. His friends shaved their heads to show support for Busse after his hair fell out following chemotherapy for inoperable lung cancer. His friends said that they didn't want him to stand out in the school so they joined him in shaving their heads.

That's exactly what God did through Jesus. God himself lived among us and identified with us. God took on our flesh and our blood, our experiences, our joys, our concerns, our trials and our tribulations. Why did he do this? To help us. To show us that we are not alone. To show us that we are loved.

Jesus was baptized to identify with ordinary people. Jesus didn't need to be baptized, but he did it anyway to identify with us. To show that he would not ask others to follow where he refused to go.

Birth in a cave at Bethlehem and not in a royal palace, surrounded by dirt and mulch, wrapped in rags, not in wealth and prestige. This, he did not refuse.

Homeless wanderings, Association with sinners and outcasts. This, he did not refuse.

Jesus entered this life, a world full of pain and sorrow. A world oppressed by the Roman Empire and a territory grabbing Caesar. Even today our world is not a friendly one. It can be harsh, hurtful, difficult and hostile, full of terror. Jesus entered this life. Not to fire bullets or plant bombs. Jesus came to stand and weep. To bathe the physical and emotional wounds caused by this harsh world. Jesus didn't bring earthquakes, tornados, or floods, but stood and still stands in the murky waters of life bringing hope in darkness. He weeps our tears.

The baptism of Jesus was also a moment of decision for him. For about 30 years Jesus lived in Nazareth. We don't know much about this period. We can use our imaginations. Watching him work at the carpenter's bench with his father. Taking the money he earned to buy food and clothes for his family. Carrying out his duties at home. First as a good family boy and then as a man. As he grew up he kept waiting for the sign – the sign that it was now time to take up the next stage in his ministry. Time to leave his home and family and become a travelling preacher,

teacher and healer. A journey that inevitably leads to a cross of wood in Jerusalem. The coming of John the Baptist was that sign. The coming of John was just what Jesus was waiting for.

With this baptism, Jesus made it clear that he was committed to the task and was prepared for all that came with it. He was committed to long, tiring days, crowds wanting to get near him, rejection, joy in seeing people healed, people turning to God, and the pain, hurt, and loneliness of those final hours. All waiting for him over the next three years.

There come times in our lives when, like Jesus, we have to make decisions concerning our own lives, our own families, our own homes, our own work, our own Christian commitment and our own service for God. Like we said last week in our Wesleyan Covenant Agreement. Prepare to be confronted by things you'd rather not do. For times when you wish you maybe didn't have to make that decisions. Jesus was prepared to make those decisions and asks us to do that too.

But he doesn't leave us alone. He doesn't call us into service and then let us get on with it in our own strength and in our way.

Finally, the baptism of Jesus was the moment he was equipped and empowered for the task that was coming when he received the Holy Spirit. In Mark's gospel, when Jesus came up out of the waters of the River Jordan, not only was there a voice saying that he was God's beloved Son, but also heaven was torn open, and the Spirit came down like a dove. That's how Jesus was equipped.

Because of Jesus, we too can be equipped and empowered as we seek to be God's light in the world. Do you feel inadequate or useless to God. Do you feel hopeless in trying to follow Christ and serve him. May you don't feel gifted. Don't feel knowledgeable enough for God to use. Don't feel strong enough to do what he calls you to. You know what? You are right! You will never be able to be God's light in the world. By your own strength. But by God's might, by God's power, and by God's Spirit. Our limitations become limitless. Our uselessness becomes usefulness. Our ignorance becomes knowledge. Our inability becomes possibility. God can and will use us effectively by the strength and power of the Holy Spirit.

This is not just an individual promise. Churches are counted in this promise too. As a church family, we might feel overwhelmed and overawed by the world, by the amount of need both here in Kingman and abroad. I know I feel it at times. It's hard to know where to start or how to get involved. We might even feel afraid to tackle something we think we might be called to do. But is there any part of the world that doesn't need to be enlightened by a Christian perspective?

It's normal to feel inadequate at times. But remember this, God will equip you by his Spirit for the task he has called you to as individuals and what he has called us as a church to do. By God's Spirit we are filled, we are equipped, we are empowered. Say this with me.

On the day he was baptized, Jesus said yes to joining us on the road of life. He said I am interested in all aspects of your life. By my baptism and ultimately the cross, I took on the whole of life. Loneliness, anxiety, pain, hurt, loss, nakedness, emptiness. I took it all and now I promise to be with you always and everywhere forever. Jesus baptism was indeed the proper way to get us all following the way of Christ.