

## **The Rev. Charlie Holt**

So today is the first Sunday of Epiphany, and we always celebrate the baptism of Jesus on the first Sunday of Epiphany. And in particular, the church is not as inviting us to contemplate our own baptism and the gift of that. And just in the next service at the 11:00 service, we're going to have four, children that are going to be baptized, and they're going to be saying the promises and the vows and receiving the promises of God in baptism.

And so I want us to think about the gift of our baptisms. But before I get there, one of the things that we see in the gospel passage is actually the problem of Jesus's baptism, when Jesus goes to John the Baptist to be baptized in the River Jordan. John, it says, would have stopped him, would have prevented him from being baptized.

He says to Jesus, I am the one that needs to be baptized by you. And do you come to me? So this is a bit of a puzzle actually. Why? Why would John have wanted to stop Jesus from getting baptized? Why? What was the problem there? And if you go back a little bit in the Gospel of Matthew, you'll see that John's baptism is described as a baptism of repentance.

It's actually a preparatory symbolic act, in a sense, going back to the days of the Exodus, when the Israelites were in bondage for 400 years in Egypt and enslaved because of their sin and their rebellion against God and their lack of trust and faith in him. And God rescued them and forgave them for their sins and delivered them from the cruel bondage and tyranny of it, and led them through the wilderness into the promised Land.

And so what John is doing by going back out into the wilderness, back out into the river Jordan is innocent, saying, we need a new exodus. We need a new, renewal to happen in our lives. And we need to make a humble repentance. When, there were some Pharisees and Sadducees that came to John and they were, questioning him, and he called them a brood of vipers.

Do you remember that from advent when, he called them the children of the snake, which was not a very nice thing to say about religious leaders, but they were hypocrites. And he asked them, who warned you to flee? And he encouraged them to bear fruit in keeping with

repentance. So, as John is, is thinking about this, he's thinking, well, Jesus, you're actually the reason why we're doing all this.

You're not the one that needs to repent. We need to repent to prepare for your coming. You're the one that we're expecting. You're the one that who's thought of whom I'm not worthy to untie. Who's going to baptize in the Holy Spirit and fire. I need to be baptized by you. Not you. By me. You don't need to repent.

We need to repent. We're the sinners. We're the ones that have been living the wrong way. The word repentance, by the way, in Hebrew, it's the it's the word choose, which is kind of a fun word to say. Shove. And what it what it means is, is, is we have to turn. It's literally what it means to turn when, at 11:00, when we do the baptismal interview with the candidates and the godparents, that is actually at the heart of what we are asking them to do.

We are asking them to turn away from evil and turn towards Jesus as their Lord and Savior. Many of you, when you were baptized, your parents, if you were baptized as a baby, your parents would have made these promises of repentance on your behalf. And what they would have been asked is to renounce Satan and the spiritual forces of evil.

The corrupt powers of this world which corrupt and destroy God's creatures, and the sinful desires that are innate within all of us, that draw us from the love of God. And you're asked three questions related to these unholy trinity, these three evils, and all three times those who are going through baptism say, I renounce them, I renounce them, I renounce them.

And what that means is that you don't want anything to do with that evil. You're you want it out of your life. You want to get rid of it. I don't like it. I don't want it. I, I, I want to turn away from it. And then you're asked three positive questions. Do you turn. There's the operative word, repentance.

You've do you turn and accept Jesus as your Savior? Do you promise to put your faith and trust and his grace and love? And do you promise to follow and obey him as your Lord? And so, in a

sense, what we're doing is we're turning away from evil and we're turning towards Jesus as our Lord and Savior and accepting him into our lives and promising to give our whole lives to him.

I love the way C.S. Lewis reflects on this. He says, fallen man, this is in mere Christianity, by the way, fallen man is not simply an imperfect creature who needs improvement. He's a rebel who must lay down his arms. And that's what, in a sense, those families are going to be doing at the 11:00. They're rebels laying down their arms.

That's a good way to think about these young families, isn't it? You rebels. Maybe I'll tell them that, just wait. You're going to wish you went to the 11:00. Lay down your arms. Surrender, I say to you. But it's more than just saying you're sorry, but it's realizing that you have been on the wrong track and that you're getting ready to start life over again from the ground floor.

And that's the only way out of our hole that we have been digging for ourselves. And this process of surrender, this movement as a full speed astern. It's what Christians call repentance. And C.S. Lewis goes on to say, it's not. It's something much harder than merely eating humble pie. It literally means unlearning prideful self conceit and self-will that we've been training ourselves into as a human race for thousands of years.

It means killing part of yourself and undergoing a kind of death. And when you put it like that, you start to wonder whether anybody can really do it. And this is the point when Jesus says to John the Baptist, I need to be baptized by you in order to fulfill all righteousness. What he's saying is, yes, you're calling people to repent.

But the problem is in and of themselves, they really aren't very good repentance. They can't do it to the degree and scope and depth to which they really need to be doing it. In fact, this is C.S. Lewis again. He says, in fact, it needs a good man to repent. In other words, you're not really going to do a good job of repenting unless you're a pretty good person.

And here comes the catch. It's the bad person that needs to repent.

Only a good person can repent perfectly, but the worse you are, the more you need it and the less you can do it. The only person who could do it perfectly would be a perfect person, and he wouldn't need to do it. For. And there's the point. We need Jesus to repent because we can't fully do it on our behalf.

We need somebody to stand in our place in that moment and go to the depths of grieving our sin and recognizing how bad it is to the depths of it, because we would never fully see it. And I, you know, I have to repent and eat humble pie. A lot of, particularly with my wife, is the main one.

I repent a lot, too. And I, I, I will, I will never do it to the degree that I need to. Have you ever experienced that? Where you. There's something about me that is a little bit prideful. And my wife sees it very clearly, actually. And she says I, you know, I see you trying, but, there's more there that you could be confessing, and inevitably, there's something in my prideful spirit that checks me from going to the depth of, of the hum humbleness that I need to get to.

And this is the case for all of us, actually, we all struggle with really, truly entering into the humility and the level of humility that we need to before God. Now, my wife is probably the one that sees my sin. The best because she lives with me and doesn't, you know, see the good face that I put on when I'm out in public.

But she sees the way I am all the time. And she knows, she knows, she knows me, live with me for 30 years. But God sees things that even my wife doesn't see, right? I mean, that's what. What? Sandy just prayed when we came in here, Almighty God, to whom all desires are known and from whom no secrets are hid.

He doesn't. He doesn't miss anything. And our thoughts, our desires, or our lives and actions. No secrets are hid from him.

And so, there's a lot there that needs repentance. But Jesus repents in our place. There's the problem of repent of Jesus's baptism. And it's in that that the glory is actually revealed. I can

imagine that when, Jesus and the. So you have the father, you have the son, and you have the Holy Spirit. Can you just picture that?

They're up in heaven talking about the plan. Jesus comes up with this idea, hey, I'm going to be born as a baby, and I'm going to come to Earth, and I'm going to repent for sins that I didn't commit. And. And then I'm going to die on a cross. And can you just picture the conversation among the members of the Godhead?

And, and the father goes, no, son, that shouldn't happen to you. You're not you're not a sinner. You're not. You haven't done anything wrong. I can't imagine that you would do that. Or the Holy Spirit goes, you want to do what? This is crazy. You're not going to do that? Just picture the Holy Spirit and the father and the son having coffee up at, at the breakfast table at the Trinity.

But that's not the response that that the triune God has. When Jesus enters into the waters of repentance and the waters of baptism, even though he has done nothing to require that or deserve it. The Holy Spirit, it says the heavens were open to him and the one person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit, comes down and rests upon him like a dove.

And then the father says in a voice, this is my son, my beloved, with whom I am well pleased. All the actions of Jesus and his humility are part of the Triune plan, where they have, I don't want to say, conspired together, but, loved together in an inner penetrating love. They have purposed in the Godhead to, in a sense, humble themselves on our behalf in order to bring us to themselves.

The glory of Jesus is baptism manifest on that day? Which didn't. Brings us to the final point the gift of Jesus's baptism. What he has done for us is what theologians call the imputation of righteousness. He has been imputed upon himself our sin. He's done for us what we can't do for ourselves. And there's a description later in the Gospels where Jesus, talks about his death on the cross as, as a baptism.

And he says, to John and James, who want to, sit at his right hand on his left and glory and, and he says, well, that's not really for me to decide, but it's appointed by my father in heaven. But

let me ask you guys a question. Can you enter into the baptism for which I am about to enter in there like, yes, Lord, we can do it.

A lot of bravado and they say, he says, I don't think you can. And what he's talking about is the death that he would die on the cross and that is described as another baptism in the Gospels, that that Jesus's death on the cross is like going down into the waters of baptism and dying. And then when he comes out of the waters of baptism, it is like the resurrection on the third day.

And what we are doing when we are baptized is we are entering into Christ. That that the process of dying and rising to new life again, that that that symbolism of baptism and water, death and resurrection. Jesus will personally go through that. In reality, it won't be a symbol for him. It will be. It will be a tangible, hard reality as he is nailed to the hard wood of the cross on our behalf.

And on that moment, our sins will be imputed to him like a high priest putting his hand on a sacrificial animal. And there's a transference in that moment of our sins to that person, Jesus. Only a perfect person could die for our sins. Only a lamb without spot or blemish. And then an exchange is made. His life, his status, his identity, his glory is mysteriously imputed to us.

The way Paul will put it later in one of his letters is, He became sin who knew no sin, so that we might become the righteousness of God. He became sin who knew no sin, so that we might become the righteousness of God. In other words, he humbled himself in the waters of baptism, and by doing that, the heavens were opened up.

Well. When we humble ourselves by going through the waters of baptism and repenting and turning to Jesus as our Lord and Savior, the heavens are opened up to us as well. And that which we could not give to ourselves. The righteousness of God is imputed to us, and the very words that were spoken over the Lord Jesus Christ are words that are just as well spoken over each and every one of you.

This is my son, my beloved, with whom I am well pleased. This is my daughter, my beloved, with whom I am well pleased. In Christ we become not just forgiven sinners, but beloved sons and

daughters of God, children of God, adopted by him into him, and heirs co-heirs with Christ of his glory. It's a lot going on in that baptism of Jesus on that day.

A big problem with it. It's resolved in glory for our gift. You are my son, my daughter, my beloved, with whom I am well placed.