

The Rev. Charlie Holt

Today is the first Sunday after the epiphany, which is the revelation of Jesus as being the Lord and Savior of all people. And we have Scripture passages today that make that point that anybody that God doesn't show any partiality shows no favoritism. But anybody that wants to be in a relationship with him through Jesus Christ, that's available to you.

And that's a wonderful, message of this season of epiphany, which is that's the revelation, the big reveal that God is wanting to be in relationship with everybody on this planet. And that goes for all of you who are here today. And the first Sunday of Epiphany, we celebrate the baptism of Jesus, which is the beginning of his public ministry as the Messiah and the Lord and Savior of the world.

And it's interesting that that, is the day that we're going to be doing some baptisms of some babies here. We have four babies that are going to be baptized. And so thank you for being a visual illustration. And reminder of our baptism, our baptisms. I think most of us in here have probably been baptized. If you haven't been baptized and you would like to be come see me, I'd love to do it.

But we, we need to be reminded of what it means and why we get baptized. And the gift that it is that we have as children of God, and our adoption into God's family and into the life of the church. But before we get that, though, I want to I want to address the problem of Jesus's baptism because it was a problem when John the Baptist was, baptizing out in the wilderness.

What he was doing was, in a sense, calling people into a baptism of repentance, which means we need to be preparing ourselves for the coming of the kingdom of God, for the coming of the Messiah. We need to be we need to be repenting of our sins and confessing our sins to God. And he was very hard on religious people that were coming out as hypocrites.

And he called them a brood of vipers. Remember that from advent, where he was, challenging them. You're not really serious about your repentance. You're not serious about confessing your sins. You're you can't handle what we're doing. And he warned them about their hypocrisy. But

people were coming from all over the region to be baptized by John, and they were being baptized for repentance.

Well, what does that mean to be? To be repenting? The Hebrew word for repentance is the Hebrew word shoe, which is kind of a fun word to say. You want to say it with me? Shoes. Shoes. Yeah. And it means basically to turn. And what we're doing when we're, when we're repenting is we're turning away from evil and saying, I don't want anything to do with Satan.

I don't want anything to do with, corrupt powers of this world. I don't want anything to do with my even my innate sin nature, and that we're about to have all these families come up here and they're godparents, and you are going to renounce evil as part of what you're doing. It's pretty heavy vow, actually. But what you're saying is, I'm going to turn away from all that is evil, and then you're going to make a positive turn towards Jesus as your Lord and Savior.

And we're going to ask, do you turn to Jesus and accept him as your Savior? There's that word shove. Do you turn? Do you, promise to put your whole trust in his grace and love? Do you promise to follow and obey him as your Lord? So, baptism. Baptism from a repentance standpoint, is something that is all about turning to Jesus.

Well, so when Jesus comes to be baptized, John the Baptist knows all about the baptism of repentance. And he says, well, you don't need to be doing this. We're actually turning towards you. I need to be baptized by you, Lord. You don't need to be baptized by me. Earlier, John had said, I'm not even worthy to untie the thong of his sandals.

He's going to be the one that baptizes with the Holy Spirit and fire. I'm just baptizing with water. And so, John, this is what it said in our gospel passage. John tried to prevent Jesus from being baptized. Now that doesn't go so well when you try to tell Jesus what to do. Sometimes, sometimes I try to do that Jesus's way.

I want things to go down. And, the Lord always gives you a little bit of an attitude adjustment when that's the way that you try to live your life. But, Jesus says, no, John, I need to be baptized by you in order to fulfill all righteousness. Well, that doesn't really clear up the problem very

much for me, but I love, what C.S. Lewis says about this, and I think he's right on the money about this.

Why does Jesus need to be baptized with this baptism of repentance? Listen to C.S. Lewis. This is from mere Christianity. He says, fallen man is not simply an imperfect creature who needs improvement. He's a rebel who must lay down his arms, laying down your arms, surrendering, saying you're sorry, realizing that you've been on the wrong track and getting ready to start life over again from the ground floor.

That's the only way out of our whole. I kind of feel like I need to confront these families that are coming up here for baptism. You rebels!

It's time to lay down your arms, according to C.S. Lewis, and to surrender your life to Jesus. That's what C.S. Lewis is saying is repentance is a serious and a big deal. This process of surrender, this movement full speed astern, is what Christians call repentance. And he says, now repentance is no fun at all. It's something much harder than merely eating humble pie.

It means unlearning all the self conceit and self-will that we've been training ourselves into for thousands of years. It means killing part of yourself and undergoing a kind of death. And here's the problem with it. I'll use my selfish example the one I need to repent the most to, other than Jesus is usually my wife, and,

And I have to do it all the time. But my problem is. And my wife will tell you this, is that I don't ever repent. Perfectly. I'm one of the worst repeaters on the planet when it comes to husband, wife stuff. And it's my pride. I don't like admitting that I'm wrong about anything. I want to be right about it, about everything.

And of course, if you know, if you're the preacher, then of course you're right about everything, right? But my wife sees through that facade because she lives with me on a daily, daily basis. And this is true of all of the people that live with us in our lives our parents, our children, our grandchildren. I mean, children are wonderful, hypocrisy meters.

They see right through your hypocrisy and know when you're being fake and dialing it in. Why? Because they live with you. They know when you're being genuine and when you're lying. Same thing with your spouse, same thing with your parents and your closest friends. But it's really true of God. We often pray and in church. We didn't do it this morning, but it's called the collect for purity where we pray, Almighty God, to whom all hearts are open, all desires are known, and from whom no secrets are hid.

As much as I can't hide things from my wife, I really can't hide things from my God. He sees right through it. And the problem is, the level of repentance that I need to get to in order to really come clean with the Lord. My pride and my self-centeredness very often prevents me from going all of the way to the depths of which I need to repent.

And this is the point that C.S. Lewis is making, he says. In fact, it takes actually a really good person to repent.

And here comes the catch. It's the bad people that need to repent. But bad people can't repent. Only good people can repent perfectly. And the worse that you are, the more you need it and the less you can do it. The only person who could do it perfectly would actually be a perfect person, and they wouldn't need to repent at all.

And there we get the answer to John's puzzle over Jesus being baptized for repentance is that he is entering into the repentance that we cannot fully enter into ourselves. And this is just the beginning of what Jesus is going to be doing for the people of this world, because one day he is not just going to repent for us, but he is going to live the life that we are called to live in a way that none of us could live.

And then he is going to die. The death that all of us deserve, and penalty and payment for our sins that none of us could pay, not one of us could pay because we aren't worthy to pay. It. We don't have enough political capital with God and moral capital with God to satisfy the need for justice, for our shortcomings and our failings and our sin.

And so he pays a price on the cross that only a perfect person could pay in order to give us his grace and his righteousness.

And so his baptism is actually just the beginning of the work of salvation that Jesus is going to be doing on our behalf as he goes all the way to the cross. And one of the images in the pictures that is so beautiful in the New Testament about the waters of baptism, and you kind of miss it with these little small fonts that we do in the Episcopal Church.

The Baptists really have it, have it over us in this regard. When they do that full immersion and you get dunked down under the water, who here wants to do that this morning? Anybody? That'd be fun. But I've actually done full immersion baptisms in the ocean and in swimming pools and Jacuzzis. And one time I did a full immersion of a Muslim woman on Christmas Eve.

She gave her life to the Lord, and she goes, I don't want the little small font. I want the full the full deal. And, by the way, if any of you haven't been baptized and you want to get the full deal, we'll figure it out. We can go out in the Saint John's River or whatever we need to do.

We will dunk you. But the imagery of the dunking is really something because what it is and this is the way it's described in the New Testament, it's, it's you are going under the waters is you're being buried with Christ, you're dying to self, and you're dying and going under the waters of death. And then when you come out of the waters, you are being made a new person and born again and made alive in Christ, in that beautiful imagery of the full immersion of that death and resurrection that happens in baptism.

Now, here's the thing about that for us, that's symbolic and it's sacramental and mysterious, and it does convey a spiritual reality of our dying to sin and being raised to new life in Jesus Christ, which is all very real, even though that it is spiritual. But it happens to Jesus physically on our behalf. His baptism is just the beginning of the process that will ultimately lead to his full immersion into the death and burial of the cross in the tomb, and he will physically come out of the tomb as the resurrected body.

And what that is, is him doing what we can't do for ourselves. And this is what theologians describe as the imputation of Christ. And there's a double imputation that happens. He becomes sin that knows no sin, so that we might become the righteousness of God. And this is the gift of baptism that we are doing right now, as all of you.

You parents and you God, parents and grandparents that are here raising these four kids. And this goes for all of us is we're all in the same boat on this kind of thing. We don't have it in and of ourselves to do the task. It doesn't mean that we shouldn't try and give it at all, give it our all and pursue Christ and surrender our hearts and our lives.

The best we can to him. But if we're honest, we're going to have a failing over and over again. And that's one of the sad things about being parents, is when they start to grow up and they're 20 years old and 21 and 22, and you're looking at them and you're going, boy, I really messed this one up.

Now, so you think to yourself as a parent, you go, how did I get this so wrong? And the reality is, and this is the honest truth is there's so much to parenting that is out of your control and only. And God's control. And you're going to do the best that you can with these kids. And God willing and with God's help, you'll raise them in the knowledge in the life of faith and teach them how to repent and how to give their lives to Jesus.

And you need to be leading your children to the Lord. That's one of your responsibilities as parents and godparents. But you will never do it perfectly. You won't get it perfectly. And this is the grace of this moment, is that Jesus is the perfect one who has done it perfectly for you. And it's by grace that you're saved.

And this is not anything that you've earned or that you can make happen, or that you can control. It's a gift from God that is given to you in this moment. It's a beautiful gift. He became sin who knew no sin so that we could become the righteousness of God. One of the most beautiful statements in all of Scripture is in this passage that we just heard read when the all three persons of the Trinity are coming together in this moment, and the Holy Spirit, you know, I can imagine the father, the son, and the Holy Spirit up in the heavenly realms having coffee around the breakfast table.

Can you picture that? And they're talking about Jesus's ideas of how he's going to save the world. And he says, yeah, I'm going to be born as a baby, and I'm going to come down. I'm going to get baptized by John the Baptist, and then I'm going to die on a cross. And I can you just picture the Holy Spirit going, you're going to do what?

That's the plan. And God the Father goes, I don't know if this is a good idea, son. That's not how the conversation went. And you see that on the day of baptism, when the Holy Spirit come, the heavens open up, the Holy Spirit comes down and rests upon the son. The Holy Spirit is all in for what Jesus is going to do.

And then the father, you hear this voice from heaven. This is my son, my beloved, with whom I am well pleased. The father is all in on what the son is going to do with giving his life for our life, to bring us to himself. And here's the wonderful thing about that he became sin who knew no sin so that we could become the righteousness of God.

Not only is he imputing upon the son our sin and the penalty of our sins on the cross, but we get the status of the son given to us. And so when the Lord looks at you as a parent or grandparent or child of God, you aren't. You weren't, just a saved sinner. You are a child of God.

You are a son. And he says, just as he said to Jesus, this is my son, this is my daughter, my beloved, with whom I'm well pleased. That's what he's saying about your kids. It's what he's saying about you and all of you who have given your life to the Lord. Is you are. You are his righteousness.

Incredible gift of baptism.