

Sermon- Our Saviors Lutheran Church- January 13th, 2019
Baptism of Jesus- Text- Luke 3: 15-17, 21-22

God is Pleased With Who?

Grace and Peace to you and from our Lord Jesus Christ. Baptism of Jesus Sunday, celebrated throughout the ELCA.

Perhaps you have heard this story. A very inebriated gentleman from Neenah stumbles across a Pentecostal Baptismal service on a Sunday afternoon down by the river. The very inebriated guy proceeds to walk down into the water and stand next to the preacher. The minister asks the guy, "are you ready to find Jesus?" The inebriated guy says, "Yes, I am." The minister then immerses the man under the water and pulls him right back up. The preacher asked, "Have you found Jesus?" The guy says, "No, I didn't !" The preacher then dunks him under for quite a while longer, brings him up and says, "Now, brother, have you found Jesus?" The man replied, "No, I did not."

The preacher, in disgust, holds the guy under the water for at least 60 seconds and then brings him out of the water and says in a harsh tone, "Well, have you now found Jesus?" The guy wipes his eyes and says to the preacher, "No, but are you sure this is where he fell in?"

Today, in our Gospel Reading, we have a scene down by a river, actually the Jordan River. People had come from surrounding cities and towns to see and hear John the Baptist. Many thought he might be the Messiah. So they came, by the hundreds, to be dunked, Baptized and chastised. John said to them "I'm not the Messiah, not even close. But when the Messiah comes, you'll know it." And then, an amazing thing happened. Jesus emerged from the crowd to be baptized. Down he went into the water and up he came with a smile on his face. What appeared to be a dove landed on Jesus' shoulder and a voice boomed from the heavens, "You are my son, I love you, I am pleased with you."

A public and a personal affirmation. I am pleased with you. All of us have this need for personal affirmation. To have our loved ones tell us that they are proud of us. As I grew up, such a personal affirmation was almost non-existent from my father. Away a lot for weeks at a time, working on a tugboat on the Great Lakes.

Also non-existent because he was Norwegian. Norwegian males didn't do that sort of thing, tell someone that they were proud of them. So my Mother did it, perhaps even took it to an extreme. My much older sister thought it was a little too much. Often she would say, "Is gullden gott coming home for dinner?" Gullden gott – Norwegian for golden boy. Ha. I don't know how it was for you? But if personal affirmation was heaped on you or not, most of us spend our days telling our children and grandchildren that we are proud of them. We are pleased with them. Yes?

All of us have this need for personal affirmation. Often, we live in a world where people crave it. It drives us to work long hours at our jobs, to bend over backwards to please people, to do heroic things in our homes, or in the community, or at the PTA, or soccer board, just to hear people say "you're great!" But the problem with that is, we have to do it all over again tomorrow, or next week, or next year. We're only as good as our last sales report, or our last grade report, or our last football game, or our last sermon. That praise is contingent on our performance. It's a temporary thing.

That's why this Gospel lesson is so important for you and me. You see, God's affirmation for you is not a temporary thing. God's love for you is not dependent upon your performance last week, or your presence at worship 6 weeks in a row, or your generous check in the offering plate. God is pleased with you. Always. Forever. Why? Because we are a baptized child of God. When we were baptized, he said I love you, I am pleased with you, I will always be pleased with you. It happened at our Baptism, and God doesn't take it back.

Oh I know what you are thinking. You are thinking that God wouldn't be pleased with you if he knew what you did last night! You are thinking that God couldn't be pleased at you if he really knew what you were like. You are thinking that you don't deserve God's praise.

Well, you're wrong. That's the way the world thinks. Thinking that your standing with God depends upon your performance. It doesn't! It doesn't! Never has. God at our Baptism said loud and clear, "You are my son, You are my daughter, I love you, I am pleased with you."

So my prayer is that when you leave here today, you carry that promise with you. When life gets tough, when the challenges appear too great, do what Martin Luther did. He used to say out loud, "I am a Baptized child of God. All will be ok." Yes, God is pleased with you. Always. Forever.

Amen. Let it be so.