

For Forgiveness      Mark 1:4-11    Baptism of our Lord    Jan 10, 2021

Began with: John appeared, baptizing in the wilderness and proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. And all the country of Judea and all Jerusalem were going out to him and were being baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. And ended with the voice - "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased." Mark 1 for Forgiveness

Dear friends in Christ, I'm sure you've heard some wedding stories. What you you rather hear - That the bride was so proud of the place settings she made, that she designed her own dress and how gorgeous it was, that the florist didn't quite get the shade right. Or would you rather hear that she was nervous until she looked to the front and saw her groom, and in his smiling face she knew he had chosen her. Or since proposal productions had become a thing, would you rather hear about how had dozens of roses waiting how he arranged for their song from the band and what it cost, how he had practiced his dance routine to look good, or would you rather hear how he knew she was the one for him and he was nervous until she said yes? Which story do you think indicates a happy marriage?

We often emphasize the beloved son of the story, and that we are joined to him and are also beloved. And this is true. But today we look at the whole match. We look at the forgiveness. The story of Jesus baptism is not about a clever match which shows off the good taste of the bride and the groom. It is a love story that leads to fear and awe. Christ does come for His bride, His Israel, His Church, His chosen one. But the emphasis is not on His good taste and certainly not on His chosen ones good taste. The people came in repentance, they came for forgiveness.

The story of Jesus baptism is not a story of a bride who picked the dress everyone would envy, whose color scheme was clever, whose theme would be remembered. All the people of Jerusalem and the country of Judea were coming out to be baptized by John, not because they could pick well, but because they were filthy in their sins. They recognized they were sinners and that they could not get to God - they were dominated by foreigners with foreign gods and even their temple was being built by Roman picked kings. John's baptism was not asking for a ceremonial I'm sorry with a wink wink nudge nudge there was noting to be sorry for. Only proselytes, those converting to Judaism, only foreigners, had been baptized routinely. In that sense, the people coming to be baptized by John were admitting they were alienated from God, they had become foreigners. They who were called by God as His people since Abraham stand condemned as unbelieving foreigners. They were filthy and unclean and needed to be washed. They needed to be baptized for forgiveness.

And even John gave them little hope. The one they came to baptize them, to make them clean, told them, "After me comes he who is mightier than I, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. I have baptized you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit." John said they need more than what John could give. The people were not beautiful - they were desperate. The forgiveness God offers isn't an adornment - it is life itself. And it needs even more than the peoples action. That forgiveness comes only with God's action.

And God does act. Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. The one who was without sin, who is from heaven, who is God himself, share the bathwater with a dirty people. He lets their dirt, their stink, stick to him as well, He who sits on the throne gets into the muddy Jordan, and says he will not rise without those whose dirt he shares. How much we fear to get to close to those who aren't well, who are dirty, who might get us sick or dirty. Yet Christ embraces a dirty people, and he will make them clean, even with the holy spirit, when he has completed his course. He embraces it here at the Jordan and carries the dirt to the cross and the tomb, to leave it there when he rises, that all people may be clean. That is the forgiveness God gives. And it begins as Christ takes our dirt.

And God says this forgiveness is his. The Father in pride says this is my beloved son. The father is proud of his son in the muck. The spirit descends like a dove. God shows his glory not beams from the heavens from on high but in the muddy waters of the Jordan. The spirit descends and the whole Trinity adds an "Amen." This is the holy work of God. This is who God is, the I am.

And Jesus carries the muck and those he is joined to, and leaves their muck in the grave. He tells us we too, all who were baptized with Him, all who share his name, also rise clean. As he is the Son, we, His bride, share His name. WE are also the beloved Son, for we are joined to Him.

What do we do with this then. Remember your baptism, that you also were baptized till the waters were black with your filth. That God himself took your sin in his son and returned it to the earth in the tomb. See with fear and awe what God has done. And then do the work of God. God's cleansing is complete. Share that cleansing with others who struggle with perfumes or lace or other ways they try to get clean. Embrace them and take them to the waters that made you clean. Let them also be joined to the son. Let them be baptized for forgiveness.

Our God has taken us who in sin were aliens and foreigners and joined us to his son. Let us rejoice in our God and in His son. He is our life and our salvation.