

Pastor Luke C. Werre
January 9, 2022
Sermon Text: Luke 3:15-17, 21, 22
The Baptism of Our Lord

RULING WITH EQUITY

One person asks, “How can a person be a democrat and still be a Christian?”
Another person asks, “How can a person be a republican and still be a Christian?”

One person asks, “How can someone be so brainless as to not get vaccinated and essentially become a murderer of everyone around them?” Another person asks, “How can so many people dive into the vaccines like lemmings jumping off a cliff when no one yet knows the long term effects of putting this foreign substance into their bodies?”

One person watches the commemoration of the events of January 6 perceiving it as one of the lowest moments in our nation’s history. Another dismisses the whole thing as propaganda intended to paint an entire swath of American citizens as willing accomplices to terrorism.

And who’s to say who’s right? Who can possibly sift through and sort out every thought, walk of life, motive, perception, understanding, inclination, objective, experience, intention, decision, deed and word of every individual to make a judgment on their correctness or incorrectness, on their worthiness or unworthiness? Who can possibly cut through the dust to fix their fate of punishment or reward?

There is Someone who can, who has been appointed to do that very thing. John the Baptist introduced Him: great David’s greater Son, Christ the King. It is the domain of kings to hold court and make judgments. John

preached: *His winnowing fork is in his hand to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his barn, but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.* As each forkful gets thrown into the breeze, you can be sure He is able to sort every fleck of chaff, every husk, every grain, every clipping of stalk. He is able to separate without fail that which goes to the flames and that which is gathered into the barn.

Presumption would not be advisable here - to presume that you will be identified as a true kernel falling safely to the refuge of threshing floor. After all, you are one of the good guys. You have reached the right conclusions about everything. The Judge must see that.

What the Judge sees is how much you have assumed the role of judge against others by your own standards, not His, the contempt you've harbored, the disdain for His civil representatives, the anger, even your exasperation with the King Himself for letting the other side get away with so much and not coming from heaven to straighten things out sooner.

Presumption would not be advisable for He perceives to the smallest speck how much in you is not fruits of the Spirit but only fuel for the fire.

Psalm 98 says, *When he comes to judge the earth, He will judge the world in righteousness and the peoples with equity.* Christ and Christ alone judges all things clearly, fairly and righteously. But is this how you want Him to come? You will be consigning yourself to the same fate you think is deserved by others.

Or would you rather have Christ come as a Friend and Savior? The beloved hymn, "Abide with Me, Fast Falls the Eventide," makes this earnest plea, *Come not in terrors as the King of kings, but kind and good, with healing in thy wings.* If you wish for Christ to come to you that way, then you must accept that He will come to all others that way.

And so Christ comes to us in His Baptism, anointed and inaugurated by this solemn Sacrament into His most sacred role not in terrors as the King of kings but as Christ the Savior with healing in His wings.

Let's take note of three things about Jesus' Baptism as recorded in Luke chapter three where Jesus is introduced to us, three things that should blow our minds. First, is this... Luke writes, *When all the people were being baptized, Jesus was baptized too.* Jesus was baptized too. Like He's among them, like He's one of them! This King is not separated from the hoi polloi by a chain link fence. There is no shout for people to stand back. The prophet Isaiah described Jesus this way: *He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him.*

The crowds were repenting of their sins and were coming to John to have their sins washed away in Baptism. Of course, Jesus had no sin to repent of, but for the important work He was undertaking called redemption, He took the identity of a sinner, of every sinner. Yes He even takes on the identity of those deluded individuals who leave you self-righteously appalled today and He befriends them. For if He had to separate Himself from them, He would have to separate Himself from you too.

His purpose is not to set down earthly borders but to open the kingdom of heaven, not to press anyone into a political ideology, but to reconcile the sinner to God. Christ's baptism marked Him and set Him on a specific path to which He had been appointed from eternity. It was a path that led to a hill called Golgotha to a cross on which He was sacrificed to atone for the sins of all.

Identifying Himself as one of us, Christ assumed the role of our substitute. He who baptizes with the Holy Spirit and with fire submitted Himself to the fire of God's judgment which we deserved. He did this for you. You can know it because when you were baptized He called you by name. He

connected you to Himself and to His death on the cross so that you are set free from God's judgment and so are all who are reborn into Christ.

The second thing we can note is the way the Holy Spirit presented Himself in Christ's Baptism. Luke chapter 3 states, *And as he was praying, heaven was opened and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form like a dove.* It was not flames that came out of heaven like what happened to Sodom and Gomorrah, but a dove! Martin Luther remarked, *God, the Holy Spirit, descends in His most friendly form, as an innocent little dove, which is the most friendly of all the birds, in whom there is no anger or bitterness, as a token that He is no longer angry with us, but through Christ wishes to help us to be saved and be faithful.*

And if those two things - Christ among the sinners and the Spirit in the form of a dove - are not enough indication of God's open and welcoming grace, this third thing clinches it: the words spoken by God the Father. Luke chapter 3 tells us: *And a voice came from heaven: "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well-pleased."* Notice, there is no reluctance in these words from the Father. There is no begrudging, no hesitancy about what Jesus was up to, no holding back. The Father is pleased, is delighted, is one hundred percent all in with the fact that Jesus is going to sacrifice Himself to save sinners. For it is the Father's will to save us. Jesus once said, *God sent His Son into the world not to condemn the world but to save the world through Him.*

I am reminded of a scene in a movie about Martin Luther in which his mentor finds him at night tormented by his dread of God's judgment. The mentor gives Luther a small crucifix to hold in his hand and urges him to keep repeating to himself over and over, "I am yours and you are mercy. I am yours and you are mercy." Thus the Father is pleased with His Son and wants you to know it.

This King Christ will still stand at His threshing floor with His winnowing fork in His hand. He still judges the world with righteousness and the peoples with equity. He will not winnow on the basis of worthiness or unworthiness. For if He did you nor I would stand a chance. This is the equity with which He now judges: *Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved. Whoever does not believe will be condemned.*

Whoever. This is what His baptism demonstrates. This is the time of His grace. His invitation to believe and be saved goes out to all. Everyone. Equally. With equity.