

The Baptism of Our Lord
01/13/2013
Shepherd of the Hills Lutheran Church
Matthew 3:13-17
David McMinn

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

The Word of God for our consideration this morning is from the Gospel according to Saint Matthew the 3rd chapter.

What is the danger of sin? Now that may sound like a silly question, but again what is the danger of sin? Please formulate an answer in your mind. It's a question we should all think about. How we judge what God says to us this morning in the Gospel according to St. Matthew depends on our answer.

"Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to John, to be baptized by him. John would have prevented him, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?" But Jesus answered him, "Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness." Then he consented. And when Jesus was baptized, immediately He went up from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened to him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on him; and behold, a voice from heaven said, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased." Thus far the Word of God.

Got your answer yet? What is the danger of sin? What about it being an affront to God and it changing His love for us? What does God say about our sin and transgressions? In Genesis 8 He says, *"I will never again curse the ground because of man, for the intention of man's heart is evil from his youth."* Jesus says this about sin and where it springs from: *"But what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and this defiles a person. For out of the heart come evil*

thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander.

These are what defile a person.” And John wrote words about God and sin that are very familiar to us. *“If we say we have not sinned, we make Him (God) a liar, and His word is not in us.”* From these few words it’s plain that how God regards us.

If you and I refrain from sin, that is as we think of sin, if we refrain from outward sin, visible sin committed with our hands, mouth and limbs it doesn’t change God’s mind about us at all. God understands that our natural inclination since the fall is sin. He says so Himself. Whether we exhibit outward sin or not God sees what happens in the inner man or woman. He knows your heart. He knows your thoughts and your inclination. Lust and murder start inside and proceed outward. Even if they’re never acted on they’re still sin. God knows your thoughts and your inclinations. Nothing is hidden from Him. The danger from sin isn’t that it’ll make God think poorly of you. He already knows you.

John the Baptist doesn’t get it either at first. Jesus comes to him to be baptized and John says no. He rightly deduces that he, John, is the one in need of Baptism. It’s very similar to Jesus’ interaction with Peter on the night of His betrayal. Jesus gets bowl and water and wraps a towel around His waist and then bows low to wash their feet. He bows before Peter to wash his feet and Peter objects, *“You shall never wash my feet.”* ‘No way Jesus, you’re the Lord and I’m but a sinner. I should wash your feet.’ Jesus corrected him by saying, *“If I do not wash you, you have no share with Me.”*

In both instances John and later Peter do not understand sin. They do not moreover, understand Jesus and His mission. I submit to you that neither do we. All too often we think that the danger of sin and the bad thing about sin is that God will be disappointed in us, that His mind about us will be changed because we sin. I've heard a number of times someone say something like, "The things I've done in my life are too bad. God can't or won't forgive me." That's just as bad as saying you're good and don't need forgiveness. Both thoughts deny who you are and they deny who God is. Both statements flow from the same error John the Baptist and Peter make.

Neither John or Peter can stand the thoughts of Jesus standing in their place. John sees rightly he is the sinner and he is in need of forgiveness. Jesus is the sinless One. John's baptism was from repentance. Jesus had nothing to repent of. Peter sees Jesus as Lord, the Messiah. He would have Jesus elevated on a pedestal. He would parade him around as the great man He is. But do a menial task such as foot washing? No. Suffer in our place? Absolutely not. Later Peter would cut off the ear of one coming to arrest Jesus and prevent His capture.

John and Peter do not understand they need Jesus to stand in their place. They both understand they need forgiveness, but they don't understand how that will happen. Forgiveness isn't a paper decree. It isn't God just saying, "Okay, I forgive you. Your sins are now gone."

Quite the opposite. Forgiveness took action. It took someone doing what was needed. And what was needed was for someone, the One, to stand in your

place. Many say Jesus was baptized to be an example and we should be baptized like He was because He was. Sorry to say, but that won't save you. Following the Law will never save you. But, receiving the Gospel will and the baptism of Jesus is nothing but Gospel.

Jesus gets in the water, because you need Him to. He knows who you are and what you need. Even 2000 years ago God knew who you are. You're a sinner. You're a person who can't redeem themselves. You're a person who regrets sin because you think it might change God, what He thinks about you. (When I was working in my uncle's law office there was a guy in court one day whom the judge came down hard on. As the man was leaving the court room he told his friend that the judge was stupid. The judge overheard him and made him stop. The judge asked him, "Did you just tell that man I'm stupid?" The guy said, "Nah, he already knew it.")

That's how it is with us and God. He already knows who and what you are. Nothing surprises Him. In fact He knew how lost you were and for that reason He sent Jesus to stand in the baptismal water for you. You needed Him there. You need Him to stand in the water for you. You need Him to be baptized even though He never sinned because you need Him to carry your sins. You need Him to load Himself up with all your guilt, shame, sickness and vice and you need Him to carry it all the way to the cross and nail it all to the cross along with His holy, innocent body. God knows about your sin and He knows what needs to be done about it.

The danger of sin isn't that it will change God. It won't. The danger is it'll change you. Every time we sin we announce to God and the world "Hey I got this don't worry about it. I can handle myself." Of course we can't, we're only deluded by Satan and our sinful nature that we can. We truly do not know the extent of our sin and what it means. But God does, and not only that but in Christ God did something about it.

The Father looked down on Jesus. He saw Him standing in the water, being baptized as though He were a condemned sinner and He was...pleased. The Father was pleased. The Son, with the Holy Spirit testifying, was standing in the water in your place.

At your baptism, when water and Word were passed over your head God was pleased again. In Christ God made all waters holy, the water in our font as well as the water in McMinnville Oregon all the way across the continent. No matter where the water is when it is poured over the head of a sinner and the Word of God is pronounced, God is well pleased. His memory says that His Son was baptized for this one. His memory says my Son died and rose for this one. God said at your baptism that with you He is well pleased. In you now, according to the faith He created in you through Word and water, resides the new nature of Christ. For His sake God is well pleased with you.

Your sinning is dangerous because it can cause YOU to forget, neglect and despise all that. That's the temptation. Jesus and His Word is the cure. Time after time God forgives you. Time after time He gives you His Word and His Sacraments. In them is life. In them is forgiveness. In them is Christ Jesus

our Lord. Amen. **Now may the peace of God which passes all understanding
keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.**