Text: Mark 1:4-11

**Introduction**

The baptism of Jesus never really made sense to me. My reaction every time I read it was roughly like John the Baptists. No way. I need to be baptized by you, and you come to me? I felt that way for a couple of reasons. The doctrinal one was simply that Jesus is supposed to be the spotless lamb of God. This baptism is the for repentance. He has nothing to repent of. Why is he here? The second reason was more in line with John’s perception of himself. “After me comes one mightier than me.” If there is someone who is going to institute something new, it should be the mightier one. Why does Jesus show up for this baptism of what, when everyone needs the baptism of the Spirit which only he can give?

It isn’t in our Markan text, but Jesus’ response to John’s protests seemingly acknowledges these facts and then says, “yes, but to fulfill all righteousness, let it be.”

So for a long time that is simply what I did – “let it be.” Accepted that there was something important – to fulfill all righteousness going on. But not completely sure that was.

**Text**

There were two things out of the baptismal text that I did find meaningful. Both having to do with the final scene. In all the gospel accounts, which are all slightly different, but consistent in this. You have the Voice of the Father, “You are my beloved Son, with you I am well pleased.” You have the Spirit descending on Jesus like a dove. And you have Jesus himself. Anybody that want to say things like “The Trinity isn’t present in the Scriptures” or “Jesus is never presented as divine” can’t read. Although given my difficulty, maybe I shouldn’t jump to such harshness. But the text was a clear demonstration of the Trinity. I also think it is a clear demonstration of the creedal phrase the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son. This is the start of Jesus’ mission and ministry. The Spirit descends from the Father, alights on Jesus the Son, and then is active in the entire ministry of Jesus.

But this anointing by the Spirit and the enablement of the ministry doesn’t have to take place in a baptism. Old Testament wise anointing would normally take place with oil. Or looking forward at Pentecost, when the same Spirit is sent by Jesus to the apostles, it just arrives on the wind in fire. The calling of the prophets was often such as that – from a burning bush to still small voice.

**Christology**

And for a long time I was simply content to “let it be.” There are lot of things in life that don’t make sense. There are lots of things we might pick up to study or understand that we eventually walk away from without understanding. If that doesn’t resonate with you, please tell me. Because I think my response would be something like John’s. You should be up here, not me. But then I had to start baptizing people myself. And I suppose “let it be” could still have been a viable answer. The church has done it this way forever. You can even see biblical pictures of it at Pentecost, when 3000 souls were baptized. Mark, you know what the answer is, just accept it.

But that answer no longer felt right. Because so much of Lutheran preaching and teaching is about baptism. How do you know that you are saved? You are baptized, right? God keeps his promises. This was not simple water only but the water combined with the Word. From a baptism itself, through a confirmation – which is a confirmation of the truth of that baptism, all the way into the funeral liturgy. “In Holy Baptism you were clothed with the robe of Christ’s righteousness that covered all your sin. Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death, buried with Him in baptism, in order that we might be raised from the dead.”

In the Lutheran way of thinking, baptism is the personal promise of God to us of forgiveness of sins and eternal life. It was no longer possible for me to just accept it. My faith that this was true needed a bit of understanding. Like John standing there saying “why am I doing this,” I felt the need to have some answer.

So this is how I came to think about the Baptism of Jesus.

The first is understand what John was doing out there by the Jordan. Israel, the people of God, before they crossed into the promised land to take possession of it, stood on the other side of the Jordan. You can read about that crossing in Joshua 3. But the Ark of the Covenant is waded out in to the middle of the Jordan and the waters part. Each tribe picks up a stone from the river bead and when they are on the other side they build one altar out of the 12 dry stones. The image is the mercy seat of God wading into the water, controlling the chaos and putting together one people safely in the promised land.

The baptism of Jesus is once again God – not above the ark this time, but the incarnate son – wading into the waters and creating a way for his people to cross into the promised land. God himself stands in the midst of the chaos of sin and says I will make a way for you. This is the biggest thing. The baptism of Jesus is part of the great exchange. He didn’t need a baptism of repentance, we did. Yet Jesus stood with us. He took our baptism, a baptism of blood that he would take all the way to the cross. And he gives to us his baptism. That baptism of the Holy Spirit. That baptism that clothed us in his righteousness. Jesus once with sinners numbered creating a people for himself.

The second bit of imagery is that exchange of blood for water. The old covenant was sealed by circumcision, an act which was exclusionary in its nature. Male only. Primarily Jewish, or at least tied in with the law of Moses, although also with Abraham. The new covenant that God was working was not to be selective in that way. It would be even more selective in that Christ was the one chosen. “Here is my beloved son.” There is only one chosen – Jesus. But the Son by his grace has chosen all those who believe in him. Both Jew and Gentile, Male and Female, Slave and Free. The people of God are created new and marked by baptism. A baptism available to babies and the old. To Ethiopian Eunuchs, gentile dealers in purple cloth and Roman Centurions and Jailors. Jesus marks us with water, while be took all the marks of blood.

So the Sophomoric quip is that Jesus never baptized anyone. Which might be literally true. We don’t have a biblical passage of Jesus baptizing. But it is dumb because it is here that Jesus blessed all waters. It is in his baptism that he gave all of his people theirs.

**Moral**

So when Jesus would eventually tell his apostles to go make disciples by baptizing and teaching, Jesus had already given them the means. He had taught them and breathed his Spirit upon them. He had also consecrated the waters in his baptism.

So even 2000 years this is the grant. I and anyone who would baptize can do it without pause because Christ has blessed the waters. And He has commanded us to use what he has given.

**Eschatology**

And it is by that not simple waters that you have been and will be ferried past our great enemy – death. Jesus stood with sinners in that river and he claimed an uncountable number as his own. We have all been incorporated into Christ standing with him in those waters of baptism. And just as death could not hold him, he is risen and will not die again, we also have been set free from the power of death.

You baptism – and the Holy Spirit that abides in you because of that – are the witnesses to this promise. God has sealed you and will carry you safely past.

So we live as Christ’s words to the Baptist – the fulfill all righteousness. We live out of our baptisms and into the life of Christ.