

The First Sunday after the Epiphany

Text: Luke 3:21-22

When all the people were being baptized, Jesus was baptized too. And as he was praying, heaven was opened ²²and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased."

Theme: Jesus Gets in Line with Us

Did you ever stand in line for a long time, and suddenly someone cuts in line right in front of you. How does that make you feel? Did you every say anything? When I was in Germany, you had to stand very close to the people in front of you in the check out line because the retired people would always cut in line right in front of you. (My father-in-law was very good at that.)



But when you look at that person, you notice that he has nothing. He cut in line ahead of you with nothing to buy. It all seems very odd, but the biggest surprise would be if he were to say, "I'd like to pay for the groceries of the person behind me."

That is a picture of what Jesus does in our text when he gets in line with us.

I. At first it looks as though he is not even in the right line.

Until this time Jesus never preached a sermon or did a miracle. He was a carpenter like Joseph. He went through the same trials, temptations, and joys that we have in life with one great exception. He was perfect. He never committed a single sin in His 30 years on this earth. John the Baptist had been preaching at the Jordan River for some time. He preached a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. Many people came, confessing their sins and rejoicing in God's forgiveness.

Then one day Jesus stood in that line of sinners. Luke simply writes, "*When all the people were being baptized, Jesus was baptized too.*" He stood in a long line of sinners, even though He had no sin. He didn't have a single sin to confess. He didn't have any sins that needed to be washed away. In Matthew's Gospel it says that John tried to stop Him.

But Jesus was indeed in the right line. By standing in this line of sinners, He accepted His office to be our Savior. A short time ago, John pointed to Jesus and said, "*Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.*" Now Jesus said, "I'm ready to do that." He was agreeing to pay the price for our sins.

The price would not be easy to pay. Right after this the devil would tempt Him to look for another way. The people that He would come to save would reject Him. Even His disciples wouldn't understand His mission. They were looking for glory without the cross. As the time came nearer, He prayed with all His might that there might be another way. When He was hanging on the cross, with nails in His hands and feet, bearing all the sins of the world, people all around Him were taunting Him, challenging Him to come down from the cross if He is the Son of God. The price that He would pay would be His innocent suffering and death on the cross for all the sins of the world. It was the greatest price that anyone has ever paid.

That is His great love for us, that He stood in line to take our place. He offered His innocent life to redeem us from all of our sins.

II. It was fitting that He began this journey in prayer.

Luke writes that *as Jesus was praying* heaven opened. It is important to note that at every major event in Luke's Gospel, Jesus is praying. For example, He prays at His baptism; He spends the entire night in prayer before choosing the 12 apostles; it is while He prays that He is transfigured; His dying words are a prayer.

This is a great example for us. As Christians God has given each of us a calling in life. While we would like it to be something glorious, it always involves a cross that we bear as we follow Jesus. Too often we think, "I can do this," but we can't. We need God's Spirit. He gives us the gifts and the strength that we need as we bear our crosses. A few years ago I received a book with BC cartoons, called, "*I Did it His Way*." The opening cartoon is very interesting. It says, "*Prayer is allowing God to have His will in your life on His terms*." We often think that prayer is trying to change God's mind, so that He does what we want. Actually, through our prayers, we come to desire what God wants. That is shown especially in the Garden of Gethsemane. Jesus prayed that there would be another way three times, but He ended by submitting Himself to His Father's will. He said, "*Nevertheless not my will, but yours be done*." He prayed that His Father's will would be done in His life, and that the Holy Spirit would give Him the gifts that He needed to carry out His Father's will. God answered that prayer. He also answers our prayers when we pray, "Thy will be done."

III. At His baptism the Father accepted Jesus' offer to take our place.

As He stood in the Jordan River, the Father said, "*You are My beloved Son; with you I am well pleased*." No one else was ever allowed to bear the sins of someone else. Moses offered his life after Israel worshiped the golden calf, but God didn't accept His offer. (Ex 32:32) There was only one person who could bear our sins. That was Jesus Christ. He was the perfect Lamb of God. If anyone missed John's testimony earlier that Jesus is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, they heard it now right from heaven. Jesus began this mission with the Father's approval, and He finished it with the Father's approval. While Jesus was hanging on the cross, Luke tells us some interesting words from Jesus. The first was, "*Father forgive them for they don't know what they are doing*." The second word was to the repentant criminal, "*Truly, today you will be with me in paradise*." How could Jesus forgive sins and even promise heaven to a repentant criminal? He could do it only with the approval of His Father. When Jesus died, Luke also writes that He died in peace, knowing that His Father had approved of His sacrifice for all of our sins. He said, "*Father, into Your hands I commit My Spirit*." Many people think that when Jesus died, His Spirit went to hell. It didn't. His body was buried, but His Spirit was taken to His Father in Heaven. Then three days later the Father's approval was shown in an even greater way than His voice at Jesus' baptism. He raised Jesus from the dead. His resurrection was the proof to all of hell and all of earth, that He has redeemed us from all of our sins.

Did you see that muddy water on our bulletin cover? Jesus got into line with those dirty sinners to be baptized in that muddy water so He could make us clean. He began His mission, filled with the Holy Spirit and with the approval of God the Father. It is because Jesus got in that line of sinners at His baptism, that the water of our baptism washes away our sins, fills us with the Holy Spirit, and makes us also into beloved children of God. We thank Him this day and every day that He got in line with us in order to pay the price of all of our sins.

Amen.

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