

“He Washes You”

Matthew 11:2-15

Last week, we saw how all the people from Jerusalem and Judea and all the region of the Jordan River were going out to hear John the Baptist preach. His popularity was not based on emotional manipulation. He wasn't teaching a 10 step approach to finding peace with God. He wasn't preaching the how-to's for finding purpose, strength, or glory in this life or holiness before our Lord.

Jesus asks, “What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed blowing in the wind? A man dressed in fine clothes with a million-dollar smile? Or did you go out to see a prophet of God?”

He was a prophet, and John wasn't just any prophet. He was the one who would come in the spirit of Elijah and prepare the way of the Lord – prepare for the Son of God to enter into this world. John came baptizing with water for repentance and the forgiveness of sin. John was preaching a message that let everyone know that being prepared for the coming of the Christ was important. They came to him confessing their sins, and he washed them.

Last week, I made a big deal about God being infinitely important. God, as He presents Himself in the Bible, is not moderately important as if we can deal with Him when and how we please. The Law demands that we are to love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul,

strength, and mind. I do not want you to think that perfection in keeping the Law is the standard for faith (because we would all be in a great deal of trouble).

It would be wrong for anyone to say, “If you have enough faith, then you will love the Lord you God will all your heart, soul, strength, and mind. And He will always be infinitely important to you.” I do not like speaking in generalizations, but “if/then” statements are NEVER the Gospel. They are always simply a new kind of Law.

The point I was making last week is that teaching the next generation that it is OK to treat God as less important than other activities to which we devote our time and energy is a false teaching and will weaken and eventually destroy their faith in the true God. We all continually fail and treat God as a secondary concern. And for this, we confess our sins, trust in the forgiveness of sins, and take comfort in the grace of our Baptism. He washes you.

Even those who we would count as being the most faithful will have doubts. John the Baptist sends some of his disciples to inquire of Jesus, “Are you the One who is to come, or shall we look for another?” Now, there is debate over whether John was the one having doubts, or was it just his disciples. I am in the camp of those who say it was not John who was having issues with who Jesus is, but he was having issues with convincing his own disciples of who Jesus is – so he sends them to the source.

After all, this is John the Baptist. God told him Jesus was the One; he heard the voice of the Father say “this is my Son whom I love,

with Him I am well pleased”; even while in his mother’s womb he leaped for joy at hearing the voice of Mary. John had proclaimed, in the spirit of Elijah, “Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.”

However, I fully understand that even those with the strongest, life-long, deep, and abiding faith will have doubts. John the Baptist, for all of his strength, faith, commitment to God, he was a sinful man. Like those coming out to hear him preach a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sin, he also was in need of the forgiveness of sin. What a joy it must have been for him to see Jesus and know that Jesus is going to be the final Lamb of sacrifice for the sins of the whole world.

But now John is in prison, and the excitement of John’s ministry felt by his disciples wasn’t as exciting. John had all of Judea coming out to hear him preach. It was good to be one of his disciples. Now, John is in prison and Jesus doesn’t seem to be doing what the heir to the throne of David should be doing. How is Jesus possibly going to conquer the Romans and reestablish Israel doing what He is doing? Is this what they were thinking? Even the 12 thought that this is what Jesus came to do. Jesus did not come to make a revolution. He came to make you clean. He washes you.

But Matthew is very deliberate. He writes, “John heard in prison about the deeds of the Christ.” What deeds? The blind receive sight, the lame walk – hey, that sounds a lot like what Isaiah said, in our Old Testament reading, that the Messiah was going to do. “Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped; then

shall the lame man leap like a deer, and the tongue of the mute sing for joy.”

“And a highway shall be there, and it shall be called the Way of Holiness; the unclean shall not pass over it. It shall belong to those who walk on the way; even if they are fools, they shall not go astray.” And they shall remain clean. Your new man daily emerges and arises to live before God in righteousness and purity forever.

I take great comfort in those words of Isaiah. Even the faithful fool struggling with faith has faith. If John’s disciples struggle to believe him when he says, “Behold the Lamb of God,” the hope is that they will believe the Word of God spoken by the prophet Isaiah. Faith comes by hearing. Faith comes through the Word of God.

Throughout the day when you speak and act in a way that shows you are struggling with God being infinitely important to you at that moment, repent, confess, and know that you are living under the grace of your Baptism. Even in your foolish moments, you are still walking on the Way of Holiness.

Jesus says, “Among those born of women, that is, according to your flesh, your person, who you are by nature, there has arisen no one greater than John the Baptist.” But he is still a sinner. He could not keep or fulfill God’s Law. Therefore, as great as he is on his own, the one who is least in the kingdom of heaven, like the baptized child, or even the baptized, forgiven fool walking on the Way of Holiness, is greater than he. You come before the Lord spiritually blind, deaf, lame, and mute. And He washes you. Amen.