**Baptism, the Great Equalizer**

Based on [Matthew 3:13-17](http://biblia.com/books/esv/Mt3.13-17)

Preached on January 8, 2017

First Sunday after the Epiphany

Pastor Nathan Fuehrer

The Baptism of Jesus has so many teachings and implications for the kingdom of God, I don’t think we could rightly cover them all in a Sunday Sermon. In his baptism, Jesus is revealed to be the Son of God by the Father, and through Baptism he becomes our Father. Jesus Baptism sanctifies purifies all water for our Baptisms, and the washing away of our sin. Jesus receives the Holy Spirit in Baptism, who sends him forth to begin his ministry of miracles and healing and teaching the kingdom of heaven, and of suffering, as in our baptism, we too receive the Spirit who prepares us for every Good Work.

Today, however, we’re going to focus on how Jesus’ own baptism shows how baptism is the great equalizer. Baptism is is no respecter of persons. Even the lowliest servant, when he is baptized, becomes worthy as a king. And even the highest king, in baptism becomes lowly as a servant. In Baptism, all are equal before God through faith. On account of Baptism, all works done in faith are holy and God-pleasing. Through Baptism, no one is lacking any good thing.

In baptism, all are equal before God through faith. This is shown in the righteousness of Jesus’ own baptism. Getting baptized is the right thing for the messiah to do. Getting baptized by someone who is lesser than him, is just. You might not think so. John the Baptists didn’t think so. When Jesus came to John to be baptized, John would have prevented him saying, **“I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?”** [**“You’re greater than me, Jesus…This is not right”**]. But Jesus answered him, “**Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness**.”

The reason Jesus’ baptism seems so unrighteous to John is because he knows Jesus is the Christ, the rightful king of all. And this king is going to submit to my baptism? Who am I to crown the king of the universe? This was the great scandal of Jesus, ministry. “Though he was in the form of God, he did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking on the form of a servant.” Jesus, the messiah, came not in power and glory, but in servanthood and submission.

Jesus came in submission to the will of his Father. Everything he did in his life was in obedience to God. **He submitted to be born of a woman; he submitted to the normal growth of being a child, and at his baptism, Jesus submitted to the ministry his father appointed him for.** He was to be the suffering servant who was obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Though he was and is Lord of all, he washed his disciples feet, giving them an example, that a servant is not greater than his master, nor a messenger than the one who sent him.

Jesus came, not only in submission to the father, but as a servant to men. Jesus is greater than John, and so according to human understanding**, it makes no sense for John, a sinner, to baptize Jesus, the perfectly holy Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.** But Jesus shows that there is neither slave nor free, servant nor master, king or subject now that he is come. Both servant and master are equal in their service to God and their worthiness before God by faith.

So, really these roles are irrelevant. Are you a servant? You are of no less value than your master. Are you a worker, your good work done in faith is just as pleasing to God as your boss’s. Are you a layman, yes you are, God does not bless Pastor’s more than you. **Wives, your heavenly Father knows your service to the family in the household.** And while the feminist movement of the last fifty-odd years has been teaching you that simply being a mother and a homemaker is a waste of time compared to competing in the male-dominated workforce, God is more pleased with a mother every time she changes a diaper, than with a husband who gets a promotion and company recognition.

Jesus came and revealed that his salvation extends to all nations, and to all peoples, regardless of social standing or vocation. **The *world*—(and by the world I mean everything that is understood not to be under the Lordship of the Triune God)--the world assumes that if you are in a position of submission or servanthood, you have less dignity, less worth than someone in authority.** The *world* assumes it is better to be obeyed than to obey. That makes rulers greater than servants. But before God’s eyes, your greatness is not measured in social standing, or worldly indicators.

Your true worth before God has nothing to do with how influential or successful or wealthy you are. All are either worthy by faith, or not at all. Jesus said, “Blessed are the poor”; that doesn’t mean if you have a lot of money you’re not blessed by God. **It means that the faithful poor are the ones who need the reminder, because the world teaches them otherwise all day every day.** And it means that rich who are tempted to take their blessedness for granted. Their blessedness is not in their riches; their blessedness is the same as the poor. Their ground for boasting is in Jesus Christ and their having received Him. And the richest person in the world, without baptism, is poor in heaven and has nothing to boast of before God.

We need this gospel today more than ever, because a different gospel has taken its place, a gospel of entitlement, often called a social gospel. Here’s what I mean. Jesus came to free the captives, to bind up the broken-hearted, to heal the sick and lame. And he did these things for some. **But notice, when his ministry ended, and he ascended into heaven, there were still prisoners in the world, still sick people.** This is because he came, not to heal every infirmity and solve every earthly problem. He will do that on the last day, but he didn’t do that when he came the first time. He came to preach that rich/poor, male/female, slave/free, are all equally loved, and equally blessed by God in baptism, the great equalizer. Because we have been equally united with him in his death and resurrection through baptism, and all have the same inheritance of eternal life.

But this different Gospel in some of its emphases [e.g. liberation theology] also teaches that Jesus came to establish his church in order to abolish all distinctions. And so Jesus becomes a revolutionary, a feminist, a liberator. **Jesus came to overthrow the government and to teach democracy and individual rights.** He came to tell wives they don’t need to submit to their husbands. He came to tell you that if your boss asks you to do more than is reasonable, you can tell him off, or refuse to work. After all, everyone is equal, and no one is any better than anyone else.

Jesus did not abolish roles and responsibilities in the world. He still calls some to give orders and others to take them. Just as he submits to the Father, Just as he submitted to John’s Baptism. Rather Jesus has come and said to all nations: **“There is no “better” or “worse” situations to be in in the world for all are equal by faith in Me**.”

The son of man did not come to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many, and he was no less a savior or Son of God on account of his service. Rather, because he humbled himself, that is why God exalted him. And yet freely--because his salvation is so needed and so undeserved--people did serve him. Wise men from the east brought him gifts. **A woman who was a sinner in need of forgiveness washed His feet with her tears.** Simon of Cyrene carried his cross. Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus took his dead body respectfully buried it in the tomb, out of nothing but love and kindness. And the women came to the tomb on the third day to anoint his body with spices. Their service seems right, and it is. But their service is not the ***good news***, and it is not why Jesus came. In fact, in service to Christ, one can end up neglecting that the reason Jesus came was to serve them, not the other way around. (Martha).

The ***good news***, the gospel, is that the Son of Man came to serve and give his life as a ransom for us. “Tis better to give than to receive,” this is why Jesus is better than us. And John knew it, and that’s why he faltered for a moment. But even though Jesus is our king, his Father, is our Father, who loves us no less than him. In fact, God gave up his only begotten son for us all, how much more will he give us all things when his glory is revealed to us.