



## Morrison Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church

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January 7, 2007

1<sup>st</sup> Sunday after Epiphany

Titus 3:4-7

Pastor Randy Ott

First Lesson: 1 Samuel 16:1-13

Psalm of the Day: Psalm 2

Second Lesson: Titus 3:4-7

Gospel: Luke 3:15-17, 21, 22

### Washed by Grace

So which is it—do you miss the snow or are you glad that it's not here?—or evidently, neither? If you are a kid here and you are going to school here, do you kind of miss the snow at recess time? One of the things at recess time when there is snow and you get out and play in it, what is one of the things that you end up doing to the other kids? Did you ever take a handful of snow and wash someone's face? Did you ever do that with snow during the winter? So now tell me, you younger kids, why did you do that? Was it out of your kindness and your love appearing? Probably not. You older kids, you might do it to someone you have a crush on, right? But it's not because of your kindness and your love that you grab that handful of snow and want to rub it into someone's face. It is probably more your sinful nature talking.

This morning when we read from Titus on the Festival of the Baptism of our Lord, he talks about a washing, but a washing that results from kindness and mercy and grace. The gracious washing that the Holy Spirit has Paul talk to Titus and us about today is the washing that takes place at our baptism, right? We see that this gracious washing is a washing of rebirth and renewal. As we think about this, we see really just how vital our baptism is—not just for something long ago—but how vital it is for each and every day of our lives today. That is what we want to think about this morning.

I said at the beginning of the service that yesterday, January 6<sup>th</sup>, was Epiphany. That is one of the festivals of the church year. It is often called "Gentile Christmas" because it marks the occasion when the wise men came and worshipped Jesus—the first Gentiles that we know of coming into contact with the Savior of the world. Today, the first Sunday after Epiphany, the reason we focus on Jesus' baptism and how it relates to the season of the church year that we call Epiphany is this—epiphany means to make known or to make apparent. At the Festival of Epiphany, it is made known or made apparent that Jesus is the Savior of all people—not just the Jews—because the Gentiles came. At his baptism, the Father speaks those words of approval—"This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!" (Matthew 17:5). He is making it known that now he is beginning his public ministry. He is going to be demonstrated to be true God and the Anointed One, or Christ, the one anointed to be our prophet, priest and king, through his powerful actions, his miracles and through his powerful words and his powerful teaching.

In the coming six or seven Sundays that we have of the season of Epiphany, that is what you are going to hear in the gospels—his powerful actions or his powerful words. All of his words and actions center on this truth that is talked about in Titus 3. When the

kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, he saved us—not because of righteous things we have done, but he saved us because of his mercy. Jesus was anointed to be the Christ—that’s Greek—or the Messiah—that’s Hebrew—that means the “Anointed One”—anointed with the Holy Spirit at his baptism to live in our place perfectly because we are sinners; to die in our place, as our high priest, to offer himself as the sacrifice that takes away our sins; to be our prophet, to speak the Word to us and to still speak the Word to us through Word and Sacraments yet today.

So on his baptism as we see him being revealed as the Messiah, the Anointed One for the whole world, we see we are justified and we see we are saved through his actions—not ours. These words from Titus point us also back to our own baptism. A washing—the Greek word for washing is “baptizo.” It’s where we get the word baptism from—a baptism of rebirth.

Do you remember when Jesus had Nicodemus come and talk to him at night and Nicodemus asked, “How do you enter the kingdom of God?” Jesus said, “You must be born of water and the Spirit.” Nicodemus probably scratched his head and looked at him like he was goofy or something and said, “How can you enter your mother’s womb a second time and be born? What are you talking about—being born again? What are you talking about with rebirth? That can’t happen.” (See John 3.) The point Nicodemus was missing is that when we are born physically, you and I are born sinful. We are born condemned to hell by the sin we are born with before we even open our mouth and commit a sin or have a sinful thought. If you think that is unfair, just think about it. How long does it take a child to reveal their own sinful nature? After Mom and Dad, what are the first words they speak? Mine. No. That isn’t coming from love for God, right? That is coming from the sinful nature. It’s easy to see. We are born needing to be born a second time—to be born spiritually because flesh gives birth to flesh. Sinful people give birth to sinful people, but the Spirit, who is holy and perfect, gives birth to people that are holy and perfect. That happens at our baptism.

Water connected to God’s Word—God tells us the Spirit brings us to faith so that we are born again so that our sins are washed away. Do you wonder how water can do that? It’s not just the water, but it is water connected with God’s Word and God’s promise gives it that power that it does what God says. It makes it so that you and I are reborn.

You and I most definitely need to be reborn. Maybe it’s as kids that we wash each other’s faces, but when we get a little older, we do it a little differently, don’t we? We don’t grab a handful of snow. We grab a handful of words, don’t we? We speak words that hurt. We do things that hurt others. We let our sinful nature loose quite often because we want someone to pay. Love and kindness doesn’t always appear from us as God tells us it should. He tells us to love as we have been loved and we don’t do it. But when we are reborn, God washes all that away. Now when God looks down at you or at me, he doesn’t see all of those terrible things that we think, say and do. He sees the perfection of Christ that we are covered in. That comes to us when God gives us the gift of faith.

What an incredible thing this is that our God has given us—a means by which we can work even in children, and he does the work. He creates faith. He washes away sin.

He does all of this—not because of the righteous things we have done, but because of his mercy. I am guessing that those of you who are here this morning who have been born and raised within the Lutheran church, I haven't told you anything new, have I? We probably have known that for as long as we have learned about baptism. But I would wager that we don't think about the second part of what Paul said to Titus as often. We think of baptism and we think of it washing away sin and creating faith and it is something that happened to us a long time ago. But the other thing that Paul says to us this morning, because the Holy Spirit told him to, is that it is a washing of renewal.

The question then becomes, what in the dickens does that mean?—it is a washing of renewal? Why do we need to be renewed? Are we some book he got off the Bookmobile? You have to be renewed so you can keep it a couple of extra weeks? In what sense do you and I have to be renewed?

When we are baptized, our sins are forgiven. When we are baptized, we are made holy in God's eyes, but we still have that sinful nature and that sinful nature still wins in our daily life, right? We didn't stop washing people's faces verbally or otherwise after we were baptized. We continue to dig and poke and prod at each other and figure out each other's buttons so that when we get irritated at each other, we can just push it right away and let that person have it. We do it because we are sinful pond scum—the kind of stuff that stinks if it stays on your shoes. That's us. We need to be renewed day after day after day after day after day after day.

So how does our baptism do that? Didn't that happen a long time ago? How does our baptism renew us day after day after day? This is the part I think we don't always focus on as often. When we have a baptism in worship and we use the order that is in the front of the hymnal, don't we talk about what baptism means for our daily life as we read together the words Luther wrote, "Baptism means that the sinful nature in us should be drowned by daily sorrow and repentance...and that a new person should daily arise to live before God in righteousness and purity forever."

Every day you and I sin. Every day, Lord willing, God leads us to see our sin and say, "Lord, I have failed you again. I am miserable. I am a horrific sinner. Forgive me." Period—no comma or "but the other people are worse than I am so you are lucky you have me." None of that stuff. Each and every time that we do that, we are going back to our baptism where, in those waters, Christ washed away our sins. Then I can know for a certainty that I am forgiven. I don't have to hope I am forgiven. I don't have to wish that I am forgiven. I don't have to think, "It would be great to be forgiven." I can know for a certainty that I am forgiven. My words and actions and all those things that I have done have been washed away, and God has taken them away.

Luther was great at understanding this. Do you remember Luther? He was just a German Monk. He said to the whole church of Christ on earth at that time, "You guys have twisted the gospel. You don't have it right anymore." He said Satan at times would come to him and say, "Who are you? You are a lowly German Monk. Who are you to say that everyone else is wrong and you are right?" Luther wrote that whenever Satan would tempt him in that way, he would say, "I am a baptized child of God! I know my God loves me. I know he has taken away my sins. He has given me the gift of

being able to look into his Word and now, when I say this is what God says, I can say it because Christ has taken away my sins in my baptism.”

So now when you and I are faced later on today with that temptation to start pushing those buttons again, you and I can say, “I am a baptized child of God. God has taken away my sins. He didn’t do it because I am pretty or good looking or because I do stuff for him. He did it because he is loving, and now I want to love him. I want to serve him. I want to live for him to his glory—not because I am going to get something out of it. Not because then he will owe me something. Not because everyone else will then come and pat me on the back and say, ‘You’re great! I wish you were my son,’ but because Christ has taken away my sins, and now I want to live for him.” That is how baptism renews us in our daily lives. So daily, think about your baptism.

We try to remind each other of our baptism fairly often. At the start of our service today, we tried to remind each other of our baptism. Do you know how we did that? I am not just waving at you folks because you are good looking when I say, “In the name of the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit” and move my hands. I am making the sign of the cross to remind you that you were baptized into the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit at your baptism and as baptized children of God, you have come together to worship the Lord who took away your sins. Every time we make the sign of the cross, whether someone makes it over us or we make it over ourselves, it is to remind us that we are baptized.

As baptized children of God, we can live in ways that glorify God instead of satisfying our sinful nature.