

## Trading Places With Jesus

Luke 3:15-22

Trinity Lutheran – Kearney, Missouri

January 12, 2013 – The Baptism of Our Lord



Grace to you, and peace, from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen. If you could trade places with anyone in the world – living or dead – who would that person be? You men – if money and wealth are a priority, perhaps you'd trade places with someone like Bill Gates or Donald Trump. They're both worth billions. Or, if you're looking to add wisdom to the mix, maybe you might trade places with King Solomon, of whom Holy Scripture says: that he "surpassed all the kings of the earth in riches and wisdom." Until the very recent past when she found herself in jail, some of you ladies might have been interested in swapping places with Martha Stewart. Or perhaps Sarah, Ruth and Lydia might be more appealing to you as Christian women.

But have you ever thought you might like to trade places with Jesus? After all, no less a person than the sainted Dr. Luther himself taught that, as Christians, we ought to be "little Christs" to one another. But if you've ever wanted to be like Jesus, have you considered His cross, with all its attendant suffering, shame and torment? I don't know about you, but I'm not so sure I'd be all that wild about having to endure such a thing as the cross. And besides, if you're going to be pious about such matters, isn't it a bit presumptuous to consider yourself worthy of trading places with our Lord?

But is such a thought really all that presumptuous? Indeed, is it not a fact that sinners trading places with Jesus is the very essence and center of the Gospel? What I mean is that while on the one hand it isn't very likely you'll be called on to go all the way to the cross – to suffer exactly as Jesus suffered – nonetheless, as His child, you have been called to take up your cross and live your life in selfless service to God. You've been called to take up your cross and bear it, even as Jesus Himself says: "if any man would come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow Me."

In a sense then, your life – as you live it out under the cross of Jesus Christ – is, in fact, the life of Jesus. You're living your life under what the Church calls the "theology of the cross" – which means that as Jesus suffered in this world of sin, each of us who follow after Him will also have to suffer as we make our way through this vale of tears toward the glories of heaven. Where you least expect and want to go in life, God will sometimes lead you. And where you least expect to find our Lord Jesus, that's the very place He's most likely to be found. For example, relying on your fallen reason, would you ever have concluded God's forgiveness could come to you through the eating of plain, simple bread and wine? Would you ever have reached the conclusion that a thorough cleansing from sin would be able to come to you through ordinary water combined with God's simple, yet all powerful, all sustaining Word?

In one sense, our Lord's call is that we trade places with Him in order to be His voice, His hands and His feet here in this world. His call is that we live our lives as members of a holy priesthood – as those who've been set apart for God's own, special purposes. It's to say with St. Paul: "to live is Christ and to die is gain." That's what it means to be a Christian. It means to live life in the sure and certain understanding that, like St. Paul, you have also been "crucified with Christ, and that it's no longer you who live, but Christ who lives in you."

However, the Gospel is more than just living your life like Jesus lived His. It's more than just "taking up His cross" and following Him. It's much more than simply fighting your way through the darkness of this sin-filled world so that one day you might finally know the peace, the rest, and the glory of heaven. And it's most definitely much more than simply trying to discern what Jesus would have done in some particular situation, and then doing likewise. The truth, you see, is that the Gospel fundamentally has

**nothing** to do with the way you live your life, but **only** with the way God looks at poor sinners such as you and me. The Gospel is all about trading places with Jesus, so that the Father might see you as if you were His very own dear Son. The Gospel is about an exchange where you give God what's yours, and He gives you what's His.

And what do you have that's rightfully yours to give to God? You certainly can't give Him your wealth – after all, it is His already, isn't it? You most definitely can't give Him your undying devotion – it's due to Him by right anyhow. You can't give Him those who are near and dear to you – they are, after all, a part of His creation already. In fact, you can't even rightly give Him your praise unless His goodness, mercy and grace first wells up that praise within you. So, what can you give to God that's rightfully yours to give? The sad truth is that the only thing you have that's wholly yours to give isn't something given to you by God, but rather by Adam – your sin. When God gives you His Son – when He sends Him into the world to trade places with you – all you have to give Him that's properly yours is your sin! And your sin is the very thing Jesus needs to save you. The Apostle Paul writes: “God made Him who knew no sin to be sin.” Jesus came into this world sinless and pure for one reason, and one reason only – so that He might become sin for us – so that He might become *the* Sinner. Or, as the hymnist writes: “But Christ, the second Adam came, to bear our sin and woe and shame, to be our Life, our Light, our Way, our only Hope, our only Stay.” (*LSB #562*)

Christ Jesus came into this world to take the only thing you have to give – your sin and your death. And yet, even though it's a pale and paltry gift you bring, our Savior takes it gladly. And, in exchange, He gives you everything that's rightly and properly His. That's why Luther called the work of our Savior for sinners “The Great Exchange” – where your sin and death become His, and His righteousness, holiness, goodness and life become yours. Now, because this “Great Exchange” has taken place, God's view of His Son is also His view of you.

And what's God's view of His Son? Listen to Isaiah: “Behold! My Servant whom I uphold, My Elect One in whom My soul delights!” God the Father delights in His Son, and therefore also de-

lights in you! Is that not an amazing thing to consider? Under the Gospel, it's not simply that God puts up with you, merely tolerates you, or grits His teeth to love you. No! He delights in you! But how can that be? It can be because you've traded places with Jesus – because you've been “crucified with Christ and it's no longer you who live but Christ who lives in you – because the life you live in the body, you live by faith in the Son of God who loved you and gave His life for you.”

And to assure you of that blessed truth – that Gospel – God, in a moment in time – as we read a few moments ago in our Gospel text – God parted the heavens, and “the Holy Spirit descended in bodily form like a dove upon Him – that is, upon Jesus – and a voice came from heaven, saying: “This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.”” The glorious truth is that God's desire isn't simply to put up with you, tolerate you, or grit His teeth to love you. Rather, according to His own testimony, He is pleased to be well-pleased with you! Or to use the more poetic words of the hymnist: “Within the Jordan's sacred flood, the heavenly Lamb in meekness stood, that He, of whom no sin was known, might cleanse His people from their own.” (*LSB #399*)

That takes us back to my original question. If you could trade places with anyone in the world – living or dead – who would that be? Well, there's really no need to answer that question, for the fact of the matter is that in Baptism you've already traded places with Jesus. You traded places with Him when those blessed waters washed over your head, and the name of our gracious, merciful Triune God was invoked – for “God made Him who knew no sin to be sin, so that you might be the very righteousness of God in Him.” At that moment your sin became His, His righteousness became Yours, and your eternal fate was sealed through the working of the Holy Spirit. There God adopted you to be His very own and to live with Him in His kingdom. Thanks be to God, who has given us the victory in our Lord Jesus Christ. To Him be the power and the glory forever and ever! Amen.

And now the peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep your hearts and minds, by faith in Christ Jesus, unto life everlasting. Amen.