

Pastor T.C. Arnold
Baptism of our Lord
Joshua 3:1-3, 7-8, 13-17
January 7th, 2018

When a journey begins, we've got to start somewhere. God's people gather for the first time on a Sunday morning in 2018 here at Christ, Platte Woods. We kick-off the New Year, at a particular point in time, with new goals or resolutions... things we want to do better this year. Yet it seems that no matter where we start, there are always obstacles in our way inhibiting a smooth transition to getting off on the right foot. We have such hopes at the end of the year... "I'm going to eat better, I'm going to exercise more, I'm going to pray more and read my bible more..." but then as times goes on, life gets in the way, and our vigor for a new and healthy way decreases. It's just too hard.

Take for example Moses and the Israelites starting their journey from Egypt to the Holy Land. How did their journey begin? Well, we know of the struggles just to leave... the ten plagues and all that. And then, when they did begin their journey, they had a huge body of water in their way. To start this journey was going to be especially difficult. Behind them were Egyptian soldiers pressing toward them ever so quickly. Before them was a body of water that hemmed them in. God, of course, delivered the Israelites by creating a wall of water on one side and a wall of water on the other so that they may pass through on dry ground. God parted the water and Israel, who was as good as dead, were brought back to life through the water of the Red Sea.

Now, consider the Old Testament text appointed for this day, the Baptism of Our Lord, from Joshua chapter 3. Joshua would also lead the people of Israel through the water, this would be the water of the Jordan from the desert to the Promised Land itself. Much the same would occur for the people. This is where their new life and new promise begins. This time the Ark of the Covenant was taken into the midst of the Jordan, the water parted and the people passed through. God was in the midst of the water and God's children passed through the death of the desert into the life of the Holy Land. Again, the people pass from death to life through water. Do you see a theme?

Don't forget also that when the prophets Elijah and Elisha came to the Jordan that Elijah took his mantle and rolled it up and struck the waters, and they parted from one side to the other, just like with Moses and Joshua. After Elijah was assumed into heaven, Elisha wanted to see if it would work for him too. So, he took the mantle of Elijah, rolled it up and struck the water. When he did the water was halved to this side and that side and Elisha crossed over on dry ground. This is where Elisha's ministry begins. This was done to show that God was truly present with the prophet who followed the train of Moses and Joshua as he would minister to the masses.

And especially we cannot forget the fact that Jesus also passed through the waters of the Jordan River. This is not mere coincidence but all part of the divine plan. There, in the waters of the Jordan, He was baptized which is where we begin a new year and a new life... through Baptism. Jesus ministry begins here... His work toward the cross begins in the water which will take him to the cross. The people of God begin at the water, Moses begins at the water, Joshua at the water, Elijah and Elisha at the water and, of course, Jesus begins His public ministry in the midst of the water.

Do you see a theme? Scripture holds together as a unified theological narrative to show that God works in an orderly way. He tends to show His righteousness in similar ways throughout all the Scriptures so that we can see Him in the midst of it all. We would expect similarities because God is a God of order who despises chaos. God has created an orderly way for you to live by giving us the 10 commandments. He has created for an orderly way to live everlastingly in heaven with Him by giving Jesus to die on the cross for our sins.

God is a God of order in a disorderly world. Just take a look around you. Every time the world and our lives veer off track, chaos ensues. You see, sin is the manifestation of chaos in the world. It takes God's orderly creation and brings about confusion and turmoil. Watch what happens when the world takes a turn away from God's orderly path. We see war instead of peace. We see confusion instead of understanding. We witness a world that is truly going through an identity crisis because not only do we not stand for what is right and Godly, but we don't stand for anything anymore. When the world steps away from God's orderly will, madness ensues.

Today the world around us says that every view, no matter if it is wrong or right to you, is valid and true. This cannot be. This means that God's truth can be truth or it can be false, depending upon your perspective. However, beloved in the Lord, God does not need us to say that God's truth is truth for it to be true. His Word of truth stands alone... apart from the way we feel about it. This is why we must hold to the truth... because it is God's that is given to us... not created in our heart because it just feels right. If this is the case, there is no right and wrong... there is no foundation of a right understanding. There is just simply chaos.

Beloved, this is why it is important for us to hold to and live the truth of God's law together. Christians are keepers of God's order. When we sin we veer off the path. Chaos is introduced to our lives and the lives of those around us. Things get off track because of our sins. So don't sin. Stay on the orderly path of God. Repent and turn over a new leaf for your life this year. I'll come right out and say it because it applies to each and every one of us... you need to be in church more this year. You need to be in His Word more this year. Come to Bible class. Get fed. The Lord brings order to your chaotic life by grace through faith in Christ Jesus. Be a part of this worshipping community and live each day of your life for Jesus.

Because He lived for you. He did everything... in order... for you. Going back to our theme... remember that in the beginning God watered the Garden of Eden by four rivers that flowed into it. Remember that the leper Naaman was told by the prophet to go down to the River Jordan to cleanse himself seven times in order to be clean from his disease. Call to mind that in Ezekiel, in his description of the Temple, he described a river flowing from the Holy of Holies out toward the people because that was the river of life for the sake of those who come to it. And finally in the Book of Revelation the Lord describes the New Jerusalem as having a river of life flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb through the middle of the city. This is the picture of life that God grants. He shows it clearly time and time again through water. He brings order for you in the midst of all that is chaotic in this world.

The Lord led the people into the Holy Land, giving them the Land of Promise through water. He gives you the Land of Promise through water too. By virtue of your Baptism, He cleanses you of unrighteousness and give you the inheritance of the Kingdom. So, when the Lord parted the waters of the Jordan in our Old Testament text for today, He does the same for you, granting safe and secure passage into heaven. This is assured through Jesus' work on the cross for you. What seemed to be complete chaos on Good Friday was the work of conquering chaotic death. Death is chaotic, but then life is the result. Jesus conquered death through death and has brought order to life once again. Each New Year is a time to be renewed in this promise. Today it is renewed, shared again, and promised to you. Thanks be to God. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.