

I like going to comedy shows because I enjoy obviously standup comedy. It's something that my wife is unfortunately not the biggest fan of but does begrudgingly go with me on occasion if the comedian is someone she finds particularly funny. A few years back I heard one standup comedian give a joke about Christ's baptism. How John the Baptist must have not known what to do and how shocked he must have been to see Jesus there before him, after all how do you baptize someone so important as the son of God? To which the comedian ends his joke with the punch line that John the Baptist must have said something along the lines of, "I baptize you in the name of you, your daddy, and your best friend."

It is funny to think about John not knowing the correct words to use or the specific actions needed in order to baptize Jesus himself. A man in the water floundering around like a fish on dry land. But this joke is told from the perspective and understanding of Christian baptism.

When we are baptized usually as infants, we as Christians believe that we are born into that Christ event. The life, death and resurrection of our Lord and Savior. Baptism for us is a one-time event that is an outward physical expression of our faith.

Jewish baptism was something similar, but it was not necessarily something that was done only one time as we believe. As I am not Jewish forgive me for the oversimplification of another religion's practices, but for our purposes of a shorter sermon and not a lengthy lecture, baptism in the era that we are reading about it in our Gospel today was an outward expression of the Jewish faith, but it was also a societal practice. Something one did when they found themselves doing an activity that was deemed unclean, such as touching a corpse. You would then go to a body of running water and be baptized to be viewed as clean once more and could only then once again participate in temple activities.

John the Baptist must have performed this action of baptism hundreds of times throughout his life, because after all it is impossible for

anyone to remain free from uncleanness forever. We are all flawed human beings who make mistakes, after all. John who finds himself in the Jordan now with Christ must have been very confused, and rightly so, because if anyone was able to stay free from being unclean forever it would certainly be the son of God.

Then when John puts word to his concern he is told by Jesus that this baptism needed to be done in order to fulfill all righteousness. But what does that even mean? What does fulfilling all righteousness mean? In fact what does it even mean to be righteous?

Being righteous simply means being in good standing with God, or being in good relationship with God is the way it was phrased to me in Seminary. Meaning essentially to be righteous in the eyes of God you follow the law, you are not living a sinful life, you are living the life that God intends for all of us. But we cannot do this as flawed human beings, thus the practice of baptism and John finding himself in the Jordan day in and out.

But since this moment here when Christ was baptized, baptism in our faith took on a new meaning. Because we acknowledge that we are forever unclean; no matter how hard we scrub, the dirt always comes back. Those of us who have raised children might be able to attest to this fact. But now when we are baptized we are brought into this event, the Christ event, the moment we have read about today in our Gospel reading, freeing us from something that we could not remove ourselves.

The remarkable piece of this Gospel that sometimes might get overlooked in this passage is surprisingly not the actual moment Christ goes into the water after his conversation with John, but rather the confirmation of Christ's actions afterwards, confirming what he had just told John was his reason for needing baptism. "To fulfill all righteousness" is what Jesus told him. To which the heavens were suddenly opened and the spirit appears like a dove and a voice from heaven says, "this is my son, the beloved, with whom I am most pleased."

Christ our savior, a righteous individual who knew what was to come of his life, the trials and tribulations he would face, the gift he would give us, the joy he would spread, the gruesome death he would face on the cross, and whose ministry began here in this moment. A man who had been on the run since practically the moment of his birth makes himself known to the public eye in this moment of affirmation of his role as the savior for the world. And we are baptized into that event, his life, his death and his resurrection.

So, today please, I invite you to take the time on your way out of the sanctuary to dip a finger into our baptismal font, to make the sign of the cross and remember our baptism, and give thanks for Christ who gave us such a blessed gift of freeing us from sin, something we were never going to be able to do on our own.

Amen.