

January 10, 2010

# After Baptism

LUKE 3:21-23A; 4:1-13

Rev. Darryl C. Evans

Through the waters of baptism, God looks at us and calls us beloved. The devil hates this. So the first thing he tries to do is to have you doubt who you really are: that you are a Child of God. This is the root of all temptation.

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In the church calendar, today is called the Baptism of Christ Sunday. Luke's Gospel tells us many people were being baptized, including Jesus. But when Jesus was baptized, it was different because the Holy Spirit descended on Him in the form like a dove, and a voice came from heaven declaring, "You are my Son, whom I love."

It's a beautiful scene. And just to drive home the point of how real this all is, we then read a long list of Jesus' family history. The genealogy that Luke gives us makes it clear that Jesus is fully human. Luke even takes Jesus' lineage all the way back to Adam in the Garden of Eden. So in Jesus' baptism and genealogy, He identifies with us.

Saying that God loves us is something that comes natural to us because it is so foundational to God's nature. We turn away from sin towards God. We are forgiven and refreshed and renewed. And everyone who believes receives the Holy Spirit, who dwells in our hearts. God sees us through the waters of baptism, and says, "You are my beloved child."

But it doesn't take long for the circumstances life to change. Life gets hard and it feels like we are out wandering in the desert -- alone. When you feel like you're in a dry empty desert, we are immediately reminded of what we don't have in our lives. What we wished we had. For Jesus, it apparently was food because He was fasting and the devil says, "If you are the Son of God... turn these stones into bread."

For us, it may be different. We may be hungering after something else. We wonder, "If only I wasn't single, then life would be good." (I am not referring here to losing a loved one, but rather hungering for something.) Or, "If I just had a little more money, then I could give my family the things I want to give them." "If I just had what my friends have, then I would be content." We always want a "little bit more" of something in life. This is the first temptation. We realize what we don't have in life, and then we hunger after it. This is the temptation that comes from being hungry: the temptation to be full. Not satisfied—not satisfied with what we have—but to have more—to be full.

This is nothing new. In fact, it goes way back in the Bible. The Hebrews were always demanding something of Moses. "If only we had freedom from Pharaoh." "If only we weren't wandering in this desert." "If only we had bread." So, God gave them manna. But when that immediate need was satisfied, they grumbled about something else.

This temptation to be full has worked so well, that the devil even tried it on Jesus. "Turn these stones into bread." After it didn't work, the devil tried again. He took Jesus to a high place, and in the flash – in an instant – he showed Him all the kingdoms of the world. "It will all be yours," the devil says, "for it has been given to me, and I can give it to anyone I want to."

Could you imagine having all the kingdoms of the world? Imagine that everything you worked so hard for, you would get. Imagine that if all that work that you put into your job, finally paid off in the promotion and that salary that you have been waiting for. Imagine that

after pouring your life out for your children or grandchildren, they grew up and had the happiness that you have been trying so hard to give them. Or imagine that all your work in the church yielded exactly the kind of fruit that you always hoped it would. It won't even cost you a cent. "It can all be yours," the devil would say, if you don't worship God. If you worship your work, or your family, or your church. The second temptation: the temptation over worship. Or as the Bible often calls it, idolatry.

This, too, is something that goes back to Moses. When the Hebrews were in the desert, they made a golden calf to worship. And God gave them the Ten Commandments: "You shall have no other gods before me."

The third time that the devil comes to tempt Jesus, he quotes scripture amidst his temptation. "If you are the Son of God... throw yourself down from the temple," says the devil, because "it is written, He will command his angels concerning you, to guard you." And in reply, Jesus quotes the scriptures as He does the other two times, when He answers, "It is written, 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'"

Every time that the devil tempts Jesus, Jesus does not fool around. He answers, but He does not enter into a debate. Arguing, discussing, debating a temptation is often a good way to play with an idea until it becomes too attractive to resist. We can turn something over and over in our minds until we convince ourselves it is right. Until we can claim that we are right. The temptation to argue with the truth.

It comes in all kinds of ways. "I can bill my client more hours, because I work harder than the next guy, so it's really ok." Or we tell ourselves, "This affair – this relationship – isn't really wrong, because I love her and what's wrong with love?" Or, "I don't really need to work at my God-given calling because the Spirit will give me exactly what I need in the way I need it." Would we throw our souls off the temple, claiming God will give us whatever we need when we need it? No, we need to work. The third temptation. The temptation to play around with the truth.

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If you're wondering how the devil could have such power to tempt Jesus, like when he says all the kingdoms of the world have been given to him, remember that being tempted is not sinning. It is not a sign of weakness. In fact, we see here how strong Jesus is. Also, remember that Satan is a liar. Just because he is claiming something, it doesn't mean it is true.

In fact, lying to us, persuading us, enticing us, inviting us, to attract us away from the truth is what the devil does. That is simply the definition of "*tempt*." That's why they are temptations. Temptations try to turn us away from the truth; the truth that *you are a child of God*. That when we turn away from sin and repent and God gives us the Holy Spirit, that we are Children of God. That God truly love us.

Sure, it's easy to accept at first. But then comes the temptation and it hangs around — when it lingers—day after day. It's easy to stand up to when things are good, but when life is hard, and all the life and energy seems to be drained out of us so that we are like a desert, it gets harder. And we begin to toy with the temptation, to believe something else. "God doesn't really love you, don't you know that? With *your* past? With all the things that you've done? Don't you know that you need to do a little bit more to make up for the past?" If you just did a little bit more. ...Sound familiar?

And then we realize all these calls for "just a little bit more" is really the old temptation that comes from being hungry. And then we realize that in Jesus Christ we have more than we could ever think to ask.

Another day of striving to make God love us, another good grade to make someone proud, another week of feeling guilty – is just a temptation to divert us from the truth: God already loves us. None of those things will really satisfy us. Like bread alone, it is not enough. We need nothing less than the words of God. We don't live "on bread alone, but from every word that comes from the mouth of God." And the first word that God says to us is in the waters of baptism is when He says, "You are my child, whom I love."

And we allow that truth to sink again deep into our hearts for while. Until, day after day, as we look about the broken world, just as Jesus did in the desert, we begin to grow discontent. Being discontent is just something that we people seem to do well. The problems of the world are all around us. Maybe we drive down the street and we see all the poverty. We know about teenage mothers in high school, and we see the racism in our town, and the hungry. We see need all around us, and we can be overwhelmed by it all.

Then we realize something. We may recognize material idols around us. We may see the lure of great wealth or power. But there are other kinds of idols that are harder to see. Anything that would take the place of God in our lives is an idol.

Even good intentions can go bad when they are not focused on Jesus. As God's people we are called to reach out to the needy. But need does not drive the church; God drives the church. We do not simply respond to needs – the church is not simply a humanitarian organization – rather, we follow God's call. We discern how God would want us to serve. *This puts God, not need or pain, at the center of what we do.* Instead of getting overwhelmed, we get joy. If anything other than God drives us, it is an idol. The temptation to follow something other than God. The temptation over worship. If temptations were easy, they wouldn't be temptations. Subtle, isn't it? "Worship the Lord your God *only*, and serve him."

Or we tell ourselves that we don't need to listen to others—because we have the situation under control. We know what we are doing. Things are going just fine, if they would just leave us alone. The third temptation: the temptation not to listen. The temptation to be right. We argue with the truth when we think we know it all. Just as the Hebrews in the desert didn't listen to God.

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At this point, we may be wondering, who on earth can do this? All these temptations are too much. Moses and Hebrews couldn't do it. The desire for bread? They had manna! The focus of worship? They worshipped a golden calf! Not listening to the truth? They broke the 10 Commandments!

This is why Jesus came. He restored the image. He was the only sinless one. The only one who made it through the temptations but did not sin. Even though he was fully human as we are, as we learned in his genealogy, He did not sin. Jesus succeeded where Israel failed.

Thank God that Jesus did what we cannot. Thank God that we are joined to Him in baptism, just as He was baptized in the Jordan River. Thank God, that through all the subtle lies, the enticements to debate sin until it becomes attractive, that through it all, because Jesus was faithful, we can come to God. Then we realize the truth: that despite our sins, despite what we did in the past, despite our failings, God loves us. God cleanses us, and He changes us. We will not stay in the desert forever.

God calls us back again to do his will. God still sends us out in mission because we have been changed from the heart. All of that is because of Jesus. Jesus shows us what kind of Savior He really is. He shows us what it means to be a Child of God. Jesus tells us again the truth: as God looks at you, He says, "You are my child, whom I love."

It was true 2,000 years ago, and it is true today. So if you hear the devil tempt you and say, “If you really are a child of God, then...” Tell him to stop right there. Claim your identity in Christ. It is particularly important that we remember this today as we have just had a session retreat and as new church officers are making vows to the Almighty today.

Be on guard against temptation. After our baptism God gives us the Holy Spirit to empower us for mission. God is sending us, and that Spirit will give us the strength to stand up against the devil. That Spirit will remind us of the truth: that you are loved of God. As we grasp hold of that truth once again, thanking God for sending Jesus, we then look forward to going out into the world, just as Jesus went out in his public ministry, because God looks at you and says, “You are my child. I love you.” Amen.

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Services at 8:30 & 11am