

Genesis 1:1-5 - "God's Purpose For Our Lives"

Pr. Kurt A. Van Fossan - The Baptism of Our Lord-B 2024

On this first Sunday after the Epiphany of our Lord, we remember the Baptism of our Lord. For it was at Jesus' baptism that God the Holy Spirit descended on Jesus *"like a dove,"* and God the Father said, *"You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased."* These were certainly epiphany or aha moments which identified Jesus as the long awaited and promised Savior. And our OT reading from Genesis emphasizes even more aha/epiphany moments which identify Jesus as our Savior when we consider the similarities between how God created the world in the beginning and how He now redeems the world (especially mankind) through Jesus Christ.

Consider, first of all, who does the work of creating and redeeming mankind. It certainly wasn't Adam who created himself out of nothing. It was God. The same is true when it comes to our redemption. After Adam and Eve's fall into sin, while their physical death did not happen immediately, their spiritual death did (Ephesians 2:1-5), making it impossible for them to turn themselves around. They were in the dark, and void of the only one who gives and sustains in us eternal life. This is similar to creation in the beginning when it was *"without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the earth."* It need God to give it the light of life. But sinful man was not only in the dark and void of God's presence, he had also rejected God's presence in his life.

So, how does God, because of His love for man, turn man around? In the beginning, after man sinned, God came to Adam and Eve in the garden and not only spoke to them words of judgement, which brought pain and suffering into their lives and the lives of all their children (including you and me), but He also brought them words of light and life through the gospel promise that a man, born of a woman, would crush the head of the evil one (Genesis 3:15).

And that brings us to Jesus Christ and His baptism in the Jordan River. Notice again the similarities with creation when it came to the new Adam, Jesus Christ, through whom God turns everything back around. At Jesus' baptism in the waters of the Jordan River the Spirit descended on Jesus *"like a dove."* This is like the Spirit *"hovering over the face of the waters"* at the time of creation. Then there's the voice of God the Father who said to Jesus *"You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased."* This is like God in the beginning saying, *"Let there be light."* Where was the light at Jesus' baptism? Jesus said, *"I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life"* (John 8:12).

But why did Jesus need to be baptized? Certainly not for His sins, since He was without sin. But, just as our Baptism unites us to Jesus' death and resurrection, which St. Paul mentions in our Epistle reading (Romans 6:4-5), so also does Jesus' baptism unite Jesus to us and our sins, emphasizing His purpose for becoming flesh in the first place—to turn us around from pointing to and worshipping ourselves and the things of this world as the givers of life, to pointing to and worshipping our Lord as the only one who gives and sustains in us true and eternal life.

This is what I especially want to focus on this morning, and what we prayed for in our Collect when we prayed to the Father in heaven, "Make all who are baptized in [Your] name faithful in their calling as Your children." What I want us to see is that as God's baptized children, our divine calling and purpose in this life is the same as Adam and Eve's in the beginning. God calls us to worship Him as the only one who gives and

sustains in us true and eternal life. And through our worship of God, God leads others to worship Him as well, especially in Jesus Christ. Of course, after Adam and Eve's fall into sin, we now lead others to join us in a paradise with Christ that we can't yet see. Instead we lead others to join us even though all we can see right now is a broken world and our broken lives, full of pain and suffering.

If you remember, after man sinned, God cursed all of creation, resulting in man's suffering in this life. God said to Adam, "*cursed is the ground because of you; in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life; thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you...*" (Genesis 3:17-18). Why did God curse the ground, causing us to suffer in this life, whether it's through the pain of trying to make a living in this broken world, or by being born with a particular handicap? [And when we think of handicaps, we shouldn't think only of things like down syndrome or blindness. Our sinful nature is the biggest handicap that we're all born with, causing even good things, like a high IQ, to be a handicap since it may encourage us to think more highly of ourselves than we should.] But again, what is the purpose of suffering in this life? Part of its purpose is to turn us **away** from ourselves and the things in this world for salvation, and turn us **to** Jesus Christ—the light and life of the world.

This means that everyone in this world, no matter what their handicap, has a divine purpose for being here. Let me give you an example. Caroline, when I knew her, was a 20 something woman with down syndrome who lived in a small town in Nebraska. Anyone in that small town who knew Caroline, also knew that she loved to go to church. She was active in her church, and was always quick to greet people with a hug. God worked in a powerful way through Caroline to help make His church a welcoming place, and to show others that He has an important purpose for all His children.

The same is also true even when it comes to our sinful past. God's purpose for our lives remains the same. By repenting of our sins and rejoicing in God's forgiveness through Jesus Christ (as we did at the beginning of this Divine Service), God works through us in powerful ways to point other sinners, like ourselves, to Jesus' death in payment for our sins, and the forgiveness He assures us of through His resurrection and His promise of forgiveness in His Word and Sacraments of Holy Baptism and Holy Communion.

When you, by the grace of God, follow Christ here this morning, with all your abilities, disabilities, and sins, to receive His gifts of forgiveness and eternal life, you are also following God's divine purpose for your life as His beloved son or daughter; pointing others to Christ. With you, God is well pleased.

All glory be to God, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

[Children's Sermon] Since I was talking about Jesus and Baptism in the sermon, I want you to think about what Baptism does for us. It washes away our sins, but does it wash away all of our troubles in **this** life? Suppose you were born blind. Would being baptized make it possible for you to see again? No. But it does make it possible for you to see or believe in Jesus as your Savior, and that's the most important thing about who you are. It's not about what you look like or how smart you are, it's all about your baptism and faith in Jesus.

Do you think, because Jesus was perfect, that He was tall and good looking? God tells us in Isaiah 53:2 that "*He had no form or majesty that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should desire him.*" In fact, when we see Jesus, He will have holes in His hands and feet. How would you like to have holes in your hands and feet? But those holes certainly didn't stop Jesus from saving us from our sins, death and the devil.

The same is true with God's work through you. No matter what you look like to the world, to God you are beautiful, and He can do beautiful things through you when you share with others the good news that Jesus is our crucified and risen Savior.