

1/12/2025

Luke 3:15-22

There are some words that we throw around here at church with defining them, and we forget that some of these words aren't used often in common speech. "Justified" or "Justification" is an example, which means that you are completely perfect, holy, just-as-if- you'd never sinned before God. "Anoint" is another one of those words- or so I thought. I heard it used a few weeks ago on a sports show, and it was talking about this young, talented basketball player. One of the speakers said that this young player was the next, "Lebron James," that he was going to be the next great basketball player. The other speaker rebuked him and said, "Can we please stop anointing these players as the next great player, he's still a kid!" I was surprised he used that word, and that he used it correctly. To anoint someone is to publicly declare them to have this special role or job. In the ancient world, as we see in our readings today, kings would be publicly anointed to declare that they had been chosen to fill this role- as we see Samuel anoint David king of Israel, and then Jesus is anointed in his baptism, and God the Father publicly declares: "You are my Son, whom I love, with you I am well pleased." That's the Gospel, the good news that we'll be discussing today. The Gospel according to the Father: **"You Are My Son."** And that means **1. Salvation by Substitution, and 2. Purification by Fire.**

**1. Salvation by Substitution.** This text is a continuation from last week where we dove into John the Baptist's teaching and preaching. John's preaching was so powerful- remember- even tax collectors and soldiers were confessing their sins and changing their ways, that people wondered if John was the Messiah. The word, "Messiah," means, "Anointed one." Throughout the Old Testament, there were prophecies about this coming anointed one and all these things he would do, and the people are wondering if John is him. But John makes it abundantly clear, he's not the Messiah. But he's coming, and he is so great that John isn't even worthy to untie his sandals, something that was the lowest job someone could have. John isn't even worthy of that- this Messiah isn't simply his master, but his creator. What makes him so different from John? John baptizes and pours the water, but Jesus is the one at work in Baptism and is doing the spiritual things that happen in Baptism. John is doing the visible part of baptism, the words and the water, but Jesus is at work in Baptism sending God the Holy Spirit to dwell in that person and re-create that person. It's interesting- John talks about fire- Jesus baptizes with fire. Fire in the Old Testament is often used to denote the presence of God. The burning bush with Moses, the pillar of fire leading the Israelites in the desert. Fire is immaterial, beautiful, warming, necessary, and yet dangerous and deadly if you get too close. And in Baptism, this holy, perfect, deadly God dwells in that person and Jesus is in control of that. But what John says next is even more terrifying: this Jesus will judge and destroy the world with fire.

We like to picture Jesus as kind and loving and he absolutely is. And, he also infinitely holy and just and punishes sin and will judge the entire world. In the same way that ancient grain farmers would separate the valuable wheat harvest from the worthless chaff by throwing it into the air,

and then the chaff would be blown by the wind against the wall, and would be burnt, Jesus is going to separate his people from those who are not, and those who aren't his people are going to burn forever in hell in the unquenchable fire. Do you understand that? Jesus isn't simply the king of Heaven, he's also the king of Hell. Hell burns with the anger and wrath that Jesus has over the selfishness, the greed, the lust, the injustice, the violence, the slander and gossip, the lies of the world. And no one can get away from Jesus' punishment. It's that simple. Which is what makes this next part so, so, so odd. Jesus himself then gets into the water to be baptized. What? Why? Baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins? Why would he be baptized? He doesn't need it! He has no sins to repent of! But as he rises from the water, God the Father announces: "You are my Son, with you I am well pleased." What's happening here? An anointing- what's been true from before the world began is now announced for all to hear- Jesus is the Christ, the Messiah, the anointed one, equal with God and the only holy enough to please God because he himself is God- anointed for a job, a purpose, a role. What is that job? To answer the burning question of all of John's listeners, and maybe your question too. I'm chaff. I'm selfish. I'm a sinner. And if Jesus is as holy and as perfect as he says he is, and I'm as sinful and selfish and lustful as the Scriptures show me to be, how can I escape the fire if no one can escape the fire? Jesus is being anointed as the one who would endure the fire for you and me. Jesus the perfect wheat will be treated like chaff, so that chaff like us can be treated like wheat. Jesus the perfect Son of God is going to suffer the fire Hell on the Cross so that we who deserve it can instead stand in the presence of God and hear him say, "You are my Son. You are my daughter. And I'm pleased with you. You're perfect in my eyes." That's what Baptism means, that's what the Gospel means. Because of Jesus, you aren't a work in progress, you are perfect in God's eyes, and this is given to you in Baptism. Everything that Christ has is yours. And before I get to the next point, I want you to hear this: listen to the voice that matters. You might hear from people, yourself even, "You are a failure." "You are a disappointment." "You are not worthy." And perhaps they're right, but when God sees you, he says, "You are my Son, you are my daughter, and with you I am well pleased." No other voice should hold as much weight in your heart than his.

**2. Purification by fire.** Words can't fully communicate how wonderful Christ's Gospel is, how free all of this is, how willingly Jesus suffered for us, how rich and powerful the Father's joy in us actually is. But I must say this, baptism also means purification by fire. Just because you are a chosen, beloved child of God does not mean that your life will all of a sudden become easy and simple and painless. Do you know what happened to John the Baptist? He was put in prison for calling out Herod because he had killed his brother and taken his brother's wife, who also happened to be his niece. And if you know what happened, you know that John was killed- his head was served on a platter to Herod's daughter. Not despite his faithfulness to God- but because of it! Where did Jesus go after this? The desert to not eat for forty days and to be tempted by the Devil. Wow! So baptism is an anointing into God's family, a declaration made about you that you are God's chosen child and he is eternally pleased with you, but then it's also

an anointing for a different kind of life- a life where you allow God to take and give as he wills, not as you will, a life where God will purify you by fire.

Anyone who works with metals knows this- that if you want to get rid of the impurities in silver or gold or any precious metal, to make it truly pure, you have to burn it so that those impurities can be exposed and removed. The truth is that because of what Christ has done, we are considered by God to be absolutely perfect and holy- we might call that “justification”- you can stand before God just as if you’ve never sinned. Although we are chaff, we are treated and kept as wheat. At the same time, we still have chaff within us. We still have our sinful natures that are selfish, lustful, greedy, envious, and so on. And God is so good that he doesn’t simply say, “Okay, you’re saved, see you in Heaven.” He, through his Word, his Sacrament, and through trials burns the chaff that still exists in our hearts. We call this process “sanctification,” the process that we become more and more like Christ. In the same way a metal-worker will purify his silver until he can see his reflection, God often burns and purifies us so that we reflect him more and more. Can you think of examples of this in your life- where God uses pain to sanctify, humble, and soften you? Sometimes you get caught in a sin or a lie and it’s painful to be caught, but it’s a good thing that leads you to repentance. Sometimes a failure or a loss helps open your eyes to see how dependent you truly are on God’s mercy. Last week, I was caught in the sin of taking my daughter for granted. To be fair, she was being really annoying with her whining and crying, but I was annoyed with her. Then, as she was walking on the couch, as I walked to go get her, she fell straight to the floor. And then she vomited. And as Maddie and I rushed her to the emergency room, I wept the entire time, begging God for mercy. It was my fault, I should have been more aware, and I should have remembered that Dot is an undeserved gift of God that he can take away any time. Thankfully, she’s okay, but I needed to have my selfishness burnt by tears- in my baptism, I was anointed as God child and anointed into a life where God lovingly burns my impurities.

You see, in Baptism, you are anointed as God’s child. You enter into a father child relationship with him. Have you ever taken something away from your child? Have you ever done something that has caused them pain, and they’ve questioned your love for them, but you did what you did out of love? For their good? Of course you have. Earlier, I told you not to give too much weight to the wrong voices, even yours. I also tell you not to give too much weight to your circumstances. Don’t let your current life, your bank account, your health, your family’s health, your prosperity be a measure of how happy God is with you. God’s most faithful servants often suffered the most pain- including Jesus. In your darkest, most painful moments, listen to the only voice that really matters, the voice that thundered at the Jordan and whispered when you were baptized: “You are my child, you are my son, my daughter, and I’m pleased with you.” And since everything that belongs to Jesus also belongs to those who are baptized in his name, his suffering is certainly included in that, but so is his resurrection and his glory. When God declares over you, “You are my Son, my Daughter,” you are anointed into Jesus’ sadness and struggle, but also his eternal glory, joy, life. Listen to the voice that matters. Amen.