

2015_01_18 Baptism of Jesus
Ascension Lutheran Church, Batavia IL
Pastor David Pfeiffer

A Great Ex--"CHANGE" Happens In Water

Mark 1:4-11

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⁴ John came baptizing in the wilderness and preaching a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins. ⁵ Then all the land of Judea, and those from Jerusalem, went out to him and were all baptized by him in the Jordan River, confessing their sins.

⁶ Now John was clothed with camel's hair and with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. ⁷ And he preached, saying, "There comes One after me who is mightier than I, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to stoop down and loose. ⁸ I indeed baptized you with water, but He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."

⁹ It came to pass in those days *that* Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee, and was baptized by John in the Jordan. ¹⁰ And immediately, coming up from the water, He saw the heavens parting and the Spirit descending upon Him like a dove. ¹¹ Then a voice came from heaven, "You are My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."

A Great Ex--"CHANGE" Happens In Water

What will it take? What will it take to change your mind? Have you ever known someone so stuck in their ways that no matter what you do, nothing will change their mind?

So here's what I'm gonna do. I'm gonna make you an offer you can't refuse.

If any of you have ever seen the movie "the Godfather" then you know this isn't necessarily a good thing. When a mob boss says, "I'm gonna make you an offer you can't refuse," what he means is, you don't really have a choice. Either he will lure you into some corrupt deal that you will regret later, or he will threaten you with death. Either way, he's going to get you to change your mind.

Repentance is a change. It is defined in Scripture as a change. A change of mind. A change of heart. A change of life. But how does God do it? Does he lure you into something you'll later regret; does he threaten you with death until you bend to his will? How does he get you to change your mind?

1. Plunged into the water as a dying sinner

Water can be quite threatening. In a day, it can mount a typhoon which causes catastrophic destruction and death. So it frightens us. If any of you have supervised little children around a swimming pool, you know what I mean. Its that fear, that insecurity of what the water can do if they should fall in. We can't breath under water. Water threatens us.

Baptism, likewise can be quite threatening. In it, we die. In it, we drown our sinful nature. In baptism, we see a reflection of who we really are when we are plunged into the water as a dying sinner.

But Satan doesn't want this to happen. So he makes you an offer. He makes you an offer you can't refuse. He lures you with a corrupt deal that you will later regret.

He says, "Here's what I'm gonna do. I'm gonna give you what you want. What you've always wanted. I'm gonna give you just what you've been longing for.

"Is it money? It is yours. That lottery ticket has your name on it. You won't have to work another day for the rest of your life and you can buy all that stuff you've been coveting.

"Have your parents been giving you a hard time? No worries. We can get them off your back. They won't bother you any more.

"Are you avoiding responsibility? No problem. You don't have to go to work today. You don't have to take care of your kids tomorrow. You don't have to face your spouse tonight.

"Just one thing. You are one of us now. You are in my debt now."

The devil has made you an offer you couldn't refuse. He lured your sinful flesh into bondage.

And what that means is, after you buy the lottery ticket, you find that its not enough. You become addicted to gambling – too much time on your hands, always wanting more, never having enough.

What that means is that you disown your parents. You don't care about them any more. You hate them, and you become so rebellious that they finally give up.

What that means is that you become a pathological liar. You refuse to take responsibility for any people or any sins in your life, always having an excuse, always justifying your actions. You lie to your boss. You lie to your kids. You lie to your spouse.

It is the bondage of the flesh – and with it, you are dying already.

But God is making another offer. He sends John to make you a different offer. He is John the Baptist and he preaches a baptism of repentance. He comes with an offer you can't afford to refuse. He calls you to the water. He comes to put to death the sins which lie so that God can bring forth something new.

He is clothed in camel's hair; uncomfortable and strange. He has a leather belt around his waist, no gold finery, no riches to offer. He eats locusts and wild honey. He is a wanderer. Outside of what we are used to. And he says, "Come."

"Come to the water and die. Come here, where you will be plunged into a watery grave. It is death I give you. A death of your old self. A drowning of what once held you in bondage. Come, and I will plunge you into the water for that dying sinner must be drowned.

"For there comes one whose sandal strap I am not worthy to untie. None of us are worthy. For He comes from heaven. He comes with the keys of heaven; He comes with the Holy Spirit and He will usher in the reign of God in the hearts of sinners."

John preaches a baptism of repentance. The word in Greek is "metanoia." Literally "a change of mind." It is a change. A change of the whole inner self. A change that the Holy Spirit works through the water and the word which turns you away from the lures of the devil. It is death to your old man. As Paul writes, "we are buried with Jesus through baptism into death."

It is a change which is more than just momentary. It is more than just a one day event for little Lilian today. This change is something the Holy Spirit renews and strengthens your whole life long. Baptism is something Lilian will be returning to her whole life long. Baptism is renewed every time we confess our sins; every time we remember God's promises; every time we preach this baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. Every time this happens: our old sinful self is plunged into the water again and something new comes forth. There in the water is where the Great Exchange Happens.

2. Arising from the water as a Beloved Son

It is a Great Ex-Change that happens in water. You are plunged into the water as a dying sinner, and there you leave behind your sins. In the water you leave behind what you once were. You are washed and touched by God's word so that what comes forth from the water is something new. Arising from the water is God's Beloved Son.

He takes his sandals off by the shore line. The sand is hot from the midday sun. His feet are the feet of a man – calloused from the many miles of walking. A man with a long journey ahead. He unstraps his own sandals, and makes his way down the bank to the Jordan.

The water of the Jordan is cold and dirty. The water is cold with the memory of what we have done; and the water is polluted with the filth of what we have left behind. But there He goes, the pure and sinless Son of God – into our earthly water, into our cold memories, into our filthy sins – and there the Ex-Change happens.

You can think of Jesus' baptism as a Great Ex-Change. In the waters of baptism you leave behind all your sins and Jesus leaves behind all his righteousness. You arise a new man, a new woman, cleansed and sanctified and living. But the opposite is true for Jesus. His baptism was only the beginning of a journey toward death. In the water Jesus was anointed with His calling as the Messiah. It was the public inauguration of His work as Christ, so that from that moment on, Jesus would begin his public ministry and path to the cross. He leaves behind His righteousness, to take on your sins and your death. Jesus baptism was where He took our place, to publicly become the sacrifice that would take away the sins of the world.

As He arises from the water, you arise from the grave. As the heavens are opened to Him, the heavens are opened to you. As God is well pleased with Him, God is well pleased with you. For you have been joined to Jesus in the water.

God tears open the heavens so that he could look down on this creation and once again be pleased. And God looks down on you, arising from that water, and says, "This is my beloved son in whom I am well pleased. This is my chosen. My cleansed child. This is my beloved, this is Adam, this is Eve; this is what I created and it is good. Take my Spirit. Be mine and live as my own. Sin shall no longer rule over you. You shall abound in my grace and my forgiveness." As you arise from the waters of baptism, you arise from the grave with Jesus to live a new life.

For, as Paul writes: "We were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life."

Our feet step onto the banks of the Jordan; they squish in the mud; we strap on those worn sandals and joined the steps of our Savior, to the cross, the grave, and the resurrection. These feet are not just the feet of a man, but they are the feet of God's own Son. The steps we now take as we go forth from the water are new steps, in rhythm with the foot prints of Christ.

Now rather than worrying about what you are going to get, you are more concerned with what you can give. Now rather than despising your parents, you honor them as God's representatives. Now rather than running away from responsibility, you embrace it – you do your job well when no one is looking, you sacrifice for your children when it seems there is nothing in it for you, you are honest and you talk to your spouse.

So how does God do it? Well, He has made you an offer you can't refuse. Not by luring you into something you'll regret. Not by threatening you into something you don't want. But by inviting you to something you can't afford to miss. He calls you in the preaching of repentance to realize this is a choice you could never make. And you need God to make it for you. So in that water, we lose all control and are taken into Christ, plunged into His death, and arisen with His life. And in this water, God has changed your mind. The Spirit has worked the Great Ex-"Change."

Come to living Word and water; Come as throngs to Jordan came, Heed the call of faith's Creator: "Be baptized in Triune Name." Allelujah! Allelujah! All who are baptized and believe, from the Father, Son and Spirit, Everlasting life receive.

Amen.