



**First United Church of Oak Park**  
**One Lord, One Faith, One Baptism**  
Matthew 3:13-17  
John Edgerton  
January 8, 2022

*And when Jesus had been baptized, just as he came up from the water, suddenly the heavens were opened to him and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, 'This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased.'*

Another telling of the Baptism of Christ:

The people were coming from all over Judea, from Jerusalem and Bethany and Jericho, to the Jordan River. They were there to see John who was called the baptizer. He was a wild figure, with a robe of camel's hair and living off the land. Now John was baptizing anyone who would come to him; he was offering a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. Turn around, be baptized, be forgiven of your sins. And people were coming, from all over Judea, Jerusalem, Bethany, Jericho.

Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan, to be baptized by him. John would have prevented him, saying, 'I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?'

And Jesus said to him, you've spoken rightly. I have come now and I am greater than you, you should not be baptizing me, you're not worthy to tie the thong of my sandals. This baptism of repenting of sins, I have no need of that, this baptism of water and forgiveness. Fire and the Holy, these are my baptism. And Jesus did not go down into the water, and the heavens did not open, and there was no voice that was heard.

And so Jesus departed to teach and perform wonders, to confront the powers, to be crucified and buried and to rise again. And the followers of Jesus took up his word, took up the cross and followed him, they strived to be like Jesus. They tried to live and teach just as he had, the man who had never needed forgiveness, the man of fire and holiness who had no need for forgiveness. The baptism of John was of course still available, for those whose failings and sins were so publicly known that public expungement was needed. But for those who received that baptism, they were no longer like Christ, not really: Christ who had no need of forgiveness.

The Christians who had no need to seek forgiveness: they were the ones who were truly like Christ. The ones who could with good reason insist on their own holiness, stand warned

by their own fire: they inherited what it meant to be like Christ. They were the ones who could lead the church, they were the ones who would hold the waters of baptism over the heads of those who by their failings required forgiveness.

Baptism was a way for someone to show that they were not worthy, could not lead, had to take up a second-class Christianity.

Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan, to be baptized by him. John would have prevented him, saying, 'I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?' But Jesus answered him, 'Let it be so now; for it is proper for us in this way to fulfil all righteousness.' Then John consented. And when Jesus had been baptized, just as he came up from the water, suddenly the heavens were opened to him and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, 'This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased.'

The things I can place upon God, theological ideas, lenses. They aren't a bad thing—Jesus is holy, living a life that is blameless when understood truly. All of that is true in its way. I look at Jesus coming to receive a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins and I know how I would react. Were Jesus himself to come to me and ask for me to baptize him, to forgive him, I would say exactly what John the Baptizer said—Lord, you have got this all backwards. You are perfect and I am the one who needs forgiveness from you. John the Baptizer is surely a greater figure than me, and he got it wrong. He has the Baptizer right in his name and somehow even he got baptism wrong.

I would have done as John did, err in believing that Christ's holiness put him beyond the need for grace. And I would have made of the Christian faith a terrible parody, without knowing it. I would have done as John did, and had I gotten my way, had John gotten his way, the Christian faith would be one of striving to perfect in order to be worthy of Christ's example. The church would be one where any error made me seem less than, farther away, worse.

So what is this baptism? What is this grace we see in these waters? This baptism of Jesus, it takes a holy man—Jesus Christ—and stands him in the same waters as me, an ordinary man. There is no room for pride; Christ's humility has transformed the waters into joyfully accepting equality with all people. There is no call for despair; Christ's holiness has transformed the waters into the tangible and real symbol of God's grace embracing all. There is no allowance for hierarchy among God's people—this one being great and that one being despised—Christ's acceptance of a lesser place than the one he deserved has transformed the waters into a river of kinship.

Before the waters of baptism transformed me, Christ transformed the waters of baptism. We as Christians, we are baptized into Christ's own baptism. That is the baptism we

proclaim here in this congregation, the baptism we memorialize on our trees of life, the baptism we call all people to joyfully accept. It is not the baptism of John, it is the baptism of Christ—one Lord, one faith, one baptism—and that is Christ's.

If you are a person who is not baptized, come to the waters. Christ has transformed them; Christ has set aside the waters for the lost, given over the waters for the least, blessed the waters for the doubting, filled the waters for those acquainted with despair. If you have been baptized, whether the waters were poured across your brow as an infant, whether you came to the water as an adult knowing something of what you would receive, whether you have strived to be holy all your life and feel you have done as good a job as any, whether you carry deep hurts and failings like chains you do not know how to break—come to the waters. The voice of God that spoke from the heavens that day speaks today as well—you are my child, beloved, in you I am well pleased. You are my child, beloved, in you I am well pleased. You are my child, beloved, in you I am well pleased. You are my child, beloved, in you I am well pleased.