

SERMON FOR JANUARY 13, 2019
TEXT: LUKE 3: 15-17; 21-22
THEME: WHO IS ON YOUR SIDE?

¹⁵ As the people were in expectation, and all were questioning in their hearts concerning John, whether he might be the Christ, ¹⁶ John answered them all, saying, "I baptize you with water, but he who is mightier than I is coming, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. ¹⁷ His winnowing fork is in his hand, to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his barn, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire." ²¹ Now when all the people were baptized, and when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, the heavens were opened, ²² and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form, like a dove; and a voice came from heaven, "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased."

In the name of Jesus,

A popular slogan in advertizing in: "We are on your side." Who can forget the popular Nationwide Insurance jingle of a couple of years ago, when a female singer would sing: "Nationwide is on your side." The insurance company wants you to believe that they are with you, through thick and thin, that if you have an issue, they will be there to help. Health, life, death, it really doesn't matter, Nationwide created a jingle to communicate the message that you are important, that they are there for you.

It is the same in the business of news journalism. Many television stations across America have as their slogan: We are on your side. The NBC station in Columbus has as a slogan: "We are local for you." The ABC station affiliate in Columbus even has gone to the length of having a web site address which reads: abc6sixonyourside. The station wants you to know that if you have a consumer issue, or if there is something that is of importance to you in your life, the station will be there to cover the news that they feel matters most to you.

Wouldn't it be nice if someone really were on your side? Wouldn't it be great if being on your side is more than a slogan, but it defines who a person is and what will happen for you? That in time of trouble you would have someone there for you? That in the daily ups and downs of life, someone would be there, just for you? Today, on this Sunday when we celebrate the Baptism of Jesus, we are reminded that because of Jesus' Baptism, and ours, that God the Father has made known with certainty that He is on your side!

You know, He doesn't have to be. God doesn't have to be on your side, my side, or anyone's side. He could have chosen to be against us! He had every reason and right to be against us. Why? Because of who we are and what we have done. The eternal God created everything to be harmony with Him. In Him we live, move, we have our existence. Yet mankind in sin has sought to become the center and reason for their own existence. Each of us has rebelled against God in our own ways. God says in His Word that you are to be holy as He is holy. But we are not. We are to love God with every fiber of our being, but we don't. God wants us to love everyone just like we do ourselves, but how many times have we turned a blind eye to someone in need? We want someone to be there for us, in the ups and downs of our life. We want to be loved for who we are; we don't want to be prejudged by anyone. We want someone to be on our side throughout life, but consider how many times you have failed to be on the side of the downtrodden, the poor, the homeless, the unloved and unlovable. We should love everyone, just like we love ourselves. And we fall woefully short.

What does each of us deserve? We don't deserve God to be on our side, we deserve God to be against us, we deserve God's full wrath and punishment. We stand before God's throne of judgment as dead people walking. There is a way that seems right to man and that way ends in death.

But God doesn't want to damn any of us. God's will and disposition towards you is one of mercy and love. Even though we don't live for God, He loves us and lives for us! He doesn't desire the death of the sinner, but that all turn to Him and live. That is why God in His love sent His only begotten Son, Jesus, into our existence. This is why the angels proclaimed: "To you is born in the city of David a Savior, Christ the Lord." It is why the angelic choir sang glory to God because God has good will toward those who are lost and condemned to Hell. This is why Jesus came, it is why Jesus was baptized, to show you and declare to you that He is on your side.

I picture John the Baptist as being a tad bit confused when Jesus came to the Jordan River to be baptized by John. When John saw Jesus, he said, "I need to be baptized by you, and you are coming to me?" John didn't understand but Jesus explained that He needed to be baptized by John to fulfill all righteousness. Jesus didn't need to be baptized because He was a sinner. He wasn't a sinner. He was the perfect sinless Son of God. Rather, Jesus came to the Jordan to be baptized by John so that He would fully identify with us sinners. He came to be baptized because we need to be baptized. We are sinful, Jesus is not. The Bible calls Jesus the perfect Lamb of God without blemish, who came down from heaven to live for us. That is why Jesus came down to be like us in every way. Jesus came not to be served but to

serve sinners, to live for you and me. Jesus came down from heaven, to live His life for you. For you. For you means that He is on your side, and He has always been on your side. He took on your sins in the waters of His Baptism, drowning them to death so that you won't drown in despair. He was anointed at His Baptism, proclaimed from heaven above that He is the Christ, the One coming from God to save His people from their sins. Listen to the Father's words: "This is My son, whom I love, listen to Him." Hear of John the Baptist's witness of the Holy Spirit coming down from above. In that moment God marked His Son Jesus as One in whom He was positively delighted. Jesus was baptized for you, for your forgiveness and eternal salvation, that your sins would be washed away and that you would become a child of God.

That is what took place when you were baptized. The Holy Spirit worked through the Word of God and the waters of Baptism to make you God's child. Baptism was given for you. In your Baptism, God the Father declares: You are my child. God delights in you and shows that He is on your side in the waters of your Baptism. He sent His Holy Spirit into your heart and life so that you would be born anew, of water and of the Spirit. This is what St Paul testifies to when he calls Baptism a washing for the soul or a washing of new birth in which you have been born again, born out of this fleshly worldly existence into a new way of life, a spiritual life, in which you believe that God is for you in Jesus Christ. You have been baptized in Christ so that Christ' death and resurrection are yours now and forever.

This is what the Apostle Paul means in our Epistle lesson for today where he writes: "Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus

were baptized into his death? ⁴ We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. ⁵ For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. ⁶ We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin.”

You are now no longer a slave to sin but instead you are a servant of Jesus Christ. Jesus serves you today. He comes to you to forgive you all of your sins. Listen again when He says to you take eat and take and drink this is My body and blood given and shed for you. For you! All that Jesus has done for you has been given to you in Baptism; He shares all that He has for you in the Lord’s Supper. Given and shed for you. All so that you can know that He is on your side, departing in peace, for the Lord is your Shepherd. Even though you walk through the valley of the shadow of death, He is with you and for you. His rod and staff comfort you. He is for you in life. He is your ever- present Help in time of trouble. He is with you and for you, He leads and guides you on the path of your life, and He is with you and for you when you pass through the waters of death, giving you the crown of everlasting life.

Because God is for you, He now gives you new life that you might live for Him by living and serving others. The Apostle reminds us: ⁷ for one who has died has been set free from sin.”

You have been given new life in Jesus because Jesus lived for you, died for you, and rose for you that you might now live for Him. For you have been saved by

a free gift of God's grace in Christ, it is not of works, so that no one can boast. You are now God's workmanship, created in Jesus Christ to serve others. To you're your neighbor and love others. To live for your neighbor and others, to help others, and to tell others about the love that God has for them in Jesus.

You are God's child. Christ is for you. You will be tested by many trials. Fears may besiege you. Worries will attack you. You may find yourself tied up in knots with fear, anxiety and worry. But the Lord reminds us that He is for you. Cast your cares on the Lord for He cares for you. Fear not, He says, I have created you; Fear not I have redeemed you. You are mine. So be confident in the Lord. He loves you in Jesus Christ. Nothing will separate you from His love and He will work all things out to your good and His glory. For He is for you and with you always. Even until the end of time.

Amen