

Sermon January 10th, 2021

Jesus Baptism Gives Us 24 Hour a Day Access to God

As we journey through life, we come across a lot of things along the way that we want to be a part of. From social gatherings to public events. From educational opportunities to job opportunities. From connecting to others to special family get togethers **(Image)**. When we have access to the things that we want to be a part of then we feel happy. Satisfied. Loved. Welcomed.

Unfortunately, we don't always have access to the things we want to be a part of. For example, you really want to go to this awesome after grad party, but you are dealing with this small technicality. You are not invited. You feel rejected and alone. Isolated from your peers on what was supposed to be the biggest night of your life **(Image)**.

Or, you really want to get to your child's sporting/music event, but you need to finish up a few things at the office first. Once you complete that last to do task you glance at the clock and notice that if you don't leave right this minute you will be late. So, you shut down the computer. Turn off the phones. And run out the door to the car. Now, if you go a little bit over the speed limit you should make it close to on time. That is if the traffic wasn't backed up due to an accident **(Image)**. Doh. Unfortunately, you end up missing out on another special event in your child's life. You disappoint your spouse, your child, and yourself. You feel like a big failure.

Or, you have a really good chance of getting that promotion at work. You have put in a lot of extra hours lately to show your employer that you are the right person for this job. You can't imagine them picking anyone else. Then the announcement comes, and it isn't you. In fact, it was no one who was working for the company. It was your employer's niece. They are doing a favour for their sister. You feel dejected and ready to quit. You can't believe you gave so much to this company just to be treated unfairly.

Or, you stand in line outside to get tickets for your favorite band's concert. You have camped out for days. Yet, when you get to the box office you see those dreaded words "SOLD OUT". You can't believe you are going to miss out on the greatest concert ever. For most of you who tune in, it was probably the Beatles or Frank Sinatra or Johnny Cash. For my generation, the Backstreet Boys or AC DC or Luke Bryan.

Or, you really like someone, and want to start a relationship with them. Unfortunately, they don't feel the same way about you. They try to put you down easy, but you still walk away questioning yourself. Wondering why you even bother to reach out. Feeling the hurt that comes from a broken heart **(Image)**.

There are a lot of things we want to be a part of, but sometimes run into barriers along the way.

During this pandemic we are no strangers to these barriers as we have our access limited to a lot of things that we want to be a part of. We can't go to games to cheer on our favorite team **(Image)**. We can't go to our favorite concert or play. Forget about a promotion. We are lucky if we have a job and have not taken a pay cut. After grad parties, or any social gathering are definitely out of the question at this time. We can't even gather for weddings or funerals really. Then there are those barriers that have kept us from seeing our loved ones in long term care homes and even in acute care settings **(Image)**.

For the people who are gathering at the river to hear John preach, they too, are no strangers to barriers. They want access to God's forgiveness and holiness, but have struggled to get this access in the Temple. The place where people believed God's presence dwelled.

Whether they are dealing with an ailment that makes them unclean or they have done something or are part of a profession that is labeled as sinful. Whether they are part of an ethnicity or gender or social group that limits where they can go in the Temple or are unable to purchase the sacrifice needed to experience this forgiveness. Whatever the reason, there were many who struggled to get access to God's forgiveness and holiness. There were many who were stuck with feeling all this shame. Longing to be liberated from this shame.

So, they find themselves wandering off into the wilderness to see John **(Image)**. Hoping John will give them access to God's forgiveness. Hoping John will cleanse them making them clean. Preparing them to re-enter the Temple. To stand in the midst of God's holiness.

In response to their longing to experience God's forgiveness and holiness, John baptizes them with water. To prepare them to experience God's forgiveness and holiness through Jesus. John goes on to talk about Jesus, the one who is to come, who will offer them 24-hour a day access to God's forgiveness and holiness by baptizing them with the Holy Spirit.

As John is sharing his testimony with them, they see Jesus coming. Ready to baptize them with the Holy Spirit. Or so they thought. Instead, what they witness is shocking to them. Jesus asks John to baptize him **(Image)**.

In Mark's gospel there is no dialogue back and forth. We are left to imagine what the reason is for Jesus to choose to be baptized. But what I think is the most important detail for Mark is that when Jesus gets baptized, the heavens are torn apart. Or in other words, the barrier between us and God is being torn apart. This same language will be used when Jesus breathes his last. In that scene we will see the Temple curtain that veils God from the people being torn in two.

Now to tear something versus something just coming apart adds emphasis to the fact that Jesus has come to change things. To make things new. That means getting rid of the old. Or in other words, ripping apart the barriers so that they are not easily put back together.

Many of us have wondered over the years why Jesus decided to get baptized when we have believed that Jesus was without sin. What Mark's gospel may be getting at in response to this question is that Jesus's baptism becomes a sign for us that Jesus has come to break down the barriers between us and God. To now give us twenty-four hour a day access to God's forgiveness and holiness. No longer do we have to live with the shame that separates us from God and from one another.

In our baptism, we too, see our baptism as a physical sign, that we are reconciled with God (**Image**). That we now have twenty-four hour a day access to God's forgiveness and holiness. That we are baptized with the Holy Spirit, which means we are always standing in the presence of God's holiness. Being cleansed from the shame that tries to bring us down.

And so, as we continue to walk through this pandemic together. As we continue to feel isolated and alone. Disconnected from those we love. As we continue to face barriers that keep us from experiencing the things that we want to be a part of. We are invited to hold on tight to our gospel message this morning. The good news that tells us that Jesus came to break down the barriers between us and God. We might be limited in a lot of things right now including coming to church Sunday mornings. But, because of Christ, we have twenty-hour a day access to God's forgiveness and holiness.

We are still connected to God. We are still being cleansed daily from the shame we experience. We are still living under the promise that God will carry us through this pandemic. Just like God finds a way to carry us through all those other experiences we face where the barriers get in the way of us experiencing those things that we really want to be a part of. Reconciling us with one another. Breathing new life on us. Giving us new opportunities and things to have access to.

Let us pray, loving God, thank you for sending us your Son who has broken apart the barriers between us and you. When we face barriers in our life that stop us from being a part of the things that we want to be a part of. Open our eyes to see that you are working in our lives, helping us by bringing down those barriers. Healing us. Restoring us. Breathing new life into us. We give thanks for our baptism, that gives us access to your forgiveness and holiness twenty-four hours a day. **Amen.**