

“Getting Credit”

Matthew 3:13-17

January 12, 2020

Isn't it frustrating, sometimes, when you're not able to get everything done that you want to do? There's always something that should have been done, but you just didn't have the time or energy to do it. Every year I say to myself, "This year I am going to get my income tax information together by the end of January." But it seems like every year I find myself starting the tax process around the middle of March and rushing to get it done by the beginning of April. Every year when we put our Christmas decorations away in my home, just when I have all the boxes packed away in the attic and think we're done, all of a sudden I'll walk into a room and there will be a small crèche on a table or a snow man on a shelf. And somehow the items that are left out always seem to belong in the bottom box in our stack of Christmas decorations. Well I usually don't feel like pulling those boxes out again, especially since I just got them to fit in the attic, so I'll plan on putting those items away the next day or maybe next week. However, it's usually not until Easter time that those items finally get put away, when we are pulling out the Easter baskets from the attic.

Life is like a juggling act and it seems like we are always dropping something. You have to work, your children need a ride to their athletic practice or picked up from band practice, you want to spend time with your family, you know it's important to exercise – but then you have things that need to be repaired or kept up at home. Maybe you would like to get involved in your community in some way, maybe you'll finally get the car cleaned out, maybe you would just like to slow down a little bit and rest, or maybe you'll get more involved at church – after all you know God wants you to spend time in worship, Bible study, and in prayer with Him.

When you look back on your day, or the week, or maybe the year that just past, you can always find something that you didn't get done. There's always another phone call that you should have made, another email you should have sent, another person you should have visited, another event you should have attended, or another errand you should have run. But who has the time to do it all?

The same is true about our lives as Christians. There is more that we would like to do, more that we ought to do for God, but how do you do it all; or how do you not feel guilty that you didn't do enough or didn't do something well enough? This morning I would like to look at a moment in the life of Jesus and see how that moment can bring all of us great comfort and encouragement in our lives as we try to do it all.

In our Gospel lesson from Matthew 3 today we see Jesus at the Jordan River where John is baptizing people, and Jesus gets in line with all of the common, everyday sinners, in order to be baptized. When it is His turn to be baptized, John asks the question that all of us would probably ask: "What are you doing, Jesus? You don't need to be baptized, I need to be baptized by you." But Jesus insisted that John baptize Him. Why? Because He came for sinners; He was to stand with sinners. These were the people who Jesus came to save, and the only way to save them and reveal His love for them was to get alongside of them. Jesus felt the need to identify with them. So He got down in the water alongside all of the men and women, and He identified with their needs. Kind of like the television show, "Undercover Boss;" where the high ranking executive of a large manufacturing company puts on the old work clothes and works on the assembly line, getting his hands dirty with the other workers to better understand what they do and to identify with their needs.

In verse 15, Jesus describes His baptism by saying, "Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness." In other words, if you can think of all the righteous things that God wants people to do while they're on this earth, I, Jesus says, have come to do them all, and that includes being baptized. I have come to do everything, says Jesus.

Just think of all the things that Jesus would have to do over the next 3 years of His life, as we know that He dies 3 years after He is baptized, to fulfill all righteousness. He would have to be a man of prayer, a man of love, a man of humble service, and a man of sacrifice – and He would have to do all these things perfectly. He would have to do it all; He could not leave anything undone.

So where did He get the strength to do it all? From His baptism. Verse 16 says, "And when Jesus was baptized, immediately he went up from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened to him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on him." Every time a baptism takes place, the Spirit of God descends on a person. At your baptism, the Spirit of God descended on you in an invisible way, and that's when the Holy Spirit changed you and caused you to be reborn as a Christian. And if you were already a

Christian when you were baptized, the Holy Spirit still came down on you at that moment and strengthened your bond with God. At your baptism the Holy Spirit gave you special gifts that you didn't have before, gifts you could use to glorify God in your life.

The Holy Spirit descended on Jesus to strengthen and equip Him to be the Savior of all mankind; and then God, the Heavenly Father – seeing what Jesus would do in the future – gives His approval by saying, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.”

What a great beginning to Jesus' public life and ministry on our behalf. He identifies with us, He is strengthened by the Holy Spirit, and He receives public approval from His Heavenly Father as He begins His work of doing it all to save us. Now when you think about it, this should actually be a great source of comfort and encouragement to all of us. Jesus came to do it all, because you and I could never do it all. No matter how hard we try, we cannot be perfect people of prayer, we're not always growing perfectly in our relationship with God, we're not perfect in loving and serving others, and we're not perfect in witnessing our faith to others. As sinners, we can't do it all. Plus, when you take those spiritual things and try to combine them with the pressures of everyday life, working and family and taking care of your home and being a good neighbor and everything else, and try to do all that perfectly, we just can't do it all.

So Jesus came to do what you and I could not do. I don't want you to get punished for your sins, Jesus says to you. I don't want you to get punished for all the things you didn't do, or didn't do well, or should have done in your life. I don't want you to get punished, Jesus says, so I will come and I will do it all, perfectly, for you. I will fulfill all righteousness. I will do all the righteous things my Heavenly Father wants me to do. I will be your substitute and I will give you the credit for everything I do. That's why Jesus came.

Do you know what that means? That means the pressure is off. You don't have to worry that you haven't done enough to please God in your life. You don't have to feel frustrated, because it's too hard to do it all. You don't have to feel guilty that you haven't done things well enough for God. Jesus has done it all, and He's done it all for you. You are a forgiven child of God, because of Jesus. Through your faith in Jesus, when God sees you, He doesn't see a sinner who hasn't done enough. He sees a Christian, who has been made righteous by Jesus. And this is what gives us strength and motivation to try to do great things for God in our lives.

At your baptism, God gave you His Holy Spirit; and He gave you the strength and the ability to serve Him and to honor Him with your life. You'll never be able to do it all, but Jesus has freed you to do as much as you can to praise God, to serve Him, and to tell others about Him with the gifts and abilities that He gave you at your baptism. May God bless you in this new year as you use your life to glorify the One who has done it all for you.