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“All Righteousness Fulfilled in Christ”

Text: Matthew 3:13-17; Romans 6:1-11; Isaiah 42:1-9

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

I was speaking with some of you this week about how those who do not go to church often misunderstand those of us who do. Specifically it was the belief that because we go to church, we think we are better than everyone else . . . or at least better than they are.

Now, I have no doubt that Christians - and perhaps all the Christians in this church today at one time or another - have given that impression to others, either by what we've said, or how we acted, or by our attitude. And when we do, shame on us. Because nothing could be farther from the truth. We don't come to church because we're better than everyone else, but because we're *not*. Because we're broken. We know what sin is and yet still do it. We know what good to do yet still don't do it. We complain instead of love. We think the worst instead of assuming the best. We remain silent far too often. We hurt other by our words and deeds, sometimes impulsive and sometimes carefully crafted and planned. We wear the name of Christ and yet if you were in a line-up could you be picked out as the Christian? So we don't come to church for a pat on the back, but to fall on our face and say: *Lord, be merciful to me, a sinner.*

Part of the problem, part of the reason we have gotten to this place, I think, is because the concepts and categories of sin and holiness are not understood anymore. Sin, for many, is no longer offense against the almighty God nor something deserving of death and eternal condemnation. Sin (in our world today) is more thought of as just flaws to correct as we strive for personal growth and fulfillment. Sin to many these days is not loss of holiness, but things like not recycling, not believing in global warming, intolerance, and smoking, while the murder of the unborn and the elderly and the sick continues under the justification of pragmatism and mercy, while men and women continue to act like animals (or maybe that's an insult to animals) when it comes to their sexuality, and you can be religious about everything but religion.

No wonder so many are so confused. Self-fulfillment and feeling good about yourself is what life has become all about. And for some, what they think the church is all about. And honestly, what some churches have become all about. And so the ones in church must be the ones trying harder, making more progress, better . . .

But now . . . how different - *how utterly the opposite, in fact* - the church of John the Baptist. Where he was preacher, the folks were coming out to him not for advice, not for self-improvement tips, not for help in self-fulfillment, but to fall on their face. To repent

and receive the merciful washing of baptism in the Jordan River. They were coming because they heard John call sinners sinners and they recognized themselves. They recognized their brokenness. And they came for the healing of that water - the healing of forgiveness.

Except for one. One person came for a completely different reason. And not because He did not believe the preaching of John - He did! In fact, it was His preaching too. It was straight from His Word. Jesus knew it was true, all of it. But He did not come because He was unrighteous, like the rest, but ***to fulfill all righteousness.*** To fulfill it for them. To be what they could not be. To do what they could not do. For them. For you.

And so Jesus was the only one who ever came to church because He was better than everyone else. And He did so not to judge us, but to rescue us. To provide for us that righteousness that we need but do not have. So He tells John the Baptist: *Let's do this!*

Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness. All righteousness. Not just His own, but all of ours too.

So Jesus is baptized to fulfill all righteousness.
We are baptized because we don't.

Jesus comes to church to give to us.
We come to receive from Him.

For that day by the Jordan was not just a photo op. Not just an appearance by Jesus with sinners and then back to His life. This is why Jesus was born. To do this. To jump into a Jordan filthy with sin, and take it. Take all those sins washed off all those sinners and put them on Himself. And not just those sins, but all sins. He wanted them all. So that when He hung on the cross, when He hung under the curse of not just the Roman government but of God, His death would be for our sin. What we deserve He would get, and what we need He would give. He came in time to die, so that we can live in eternity. And that all begins now with His baptism.

And it begins for us in our baptism. That's what St. Paul was describing when he wrote to the Christians in Rome. Baptism is where we die - *and rise* - with Jesus. Those waters - wherever they may be today - are still washing sins off of sinners and giving the healing of forgiveness. But not only that, but doing something new as well. Declaring us children of God and giving us a new spirit - His Holy Spirit - that we may live a new life.

For what happened to Jesus at His baptism now happens to you in your baptism. He took your place so that you can have His place. So when you are baptized, heaven is open *to you*, the Spirit is given *to you*, and the Father declares *you His beloved Son, with whom He is well-pleased.* Not because you're better than most, not because you've made enough progress, not because you deserve it, but as the gift of Jesus. The Son of God who

wants you to be sons of God, and to have a new life set free from slavery to sin. Set free from anger, from despair, from greed, from jealousy, from pettiness, from self-absorption, from those desires and impulses that divide and hurt and so often rule our lives. *That's slavery*. To be driven by those things that take and do not give. No, even worse than that - that take and make you think you are getting what you want, only to find out later . . . that box you're holding . . . is empty.

At that point, that point of emptiness, some then turn to suicide, to drugs, to sex, or delve deeper and deeper into their sin of choice, thinking that happiness and hope must be in there *somewhere*. But satan is like that Three Card Monty guy on the street - he shows it to you, but you can never quite catch up to it; you can never quite get it. Some find that out in this life; some, sadly, in the next.

So don't *continue* in sin, don't *die* in sin, don't be *enslaved* again by sin, Paul says. There's a better way. Die *and rise*, die *and live*, with Christ. Die in repentance and be raised and set free in His forgiveness. Don't come here in your pride and self-righteousness, but as the filthy, unrighteous person you are, and receive His righteousness, His forgiveness, His life, His salvation. Fall on your face as the people did at the Jordan, and now hear your Saviour say to you: *I forgive you all your sins*. Your unrighteousness is mine, and my righteousness is yours. Your death is mine, and my life is yours. *Go, you are free!*

That's the ***new thing*** Isaiah declared would happen, and that Jesus did. Starting at the Jordan and then continuing wherever He went. For the Jordan isn't the only place Jesus went to be with sinners, He came into a world of sinners to visit them, reach out to them, touch them, heal them, forgive them, and eat with them. *Exactly what continues to happen here, today*. Jesus came for sinners, and still does. He comes here for you, to this house, to this church, to speak, to forgive, to feed, to be with you and fill you with Himself. ***To fulfill all righteousness*** in you. That you be set free to live a new life, His life. A life filled with His forgiveness and love. To receive it here, and go out and give it to the world.

As you do, thanks be to God!

As you *don't*, come back and receive *again* the forgiveness and life you need.

For just as at the Jordan, the church is the place for sinners, for the broken, for the struggling, for the fallen.

And just as at the Jordan, the church is the place where Christ is, **for you**.

In the Name of the Father and of the (+) Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.