



## ST. ANDREW'S IN THE PINES EPISCOPAL CHURCH

SERMON  
1-12-14

It always comes around to baptism. 4 times a year we are to remember or renew our baptismal vows and then we also celebrate baptisms others times in the year when we baptize folks in our midst. So, in my mind it always comes around to baptism.

Although there was a little girl in a Sunday school class that thought differently. A priest friend of mine was guest teaching the class and began by describing a squirrel he could see outside the window. At the end he asked, “what is it?” and the little girl answered, “Jesus.” “Jesus, my friend said, why do you say Jesus?” “Because, she replied, Jesus is always the answer we’re supposed to say when they ask us a question in church.” So, maybe, often, everything comes around to Jesus. But today we have Jesus and he’s come to be baptized. Now John is hesitant to baptize Jesus, but Jesus tells him it must be done to fulfill all righteousness. To fulfill all righteousness.

Righteousness is one of those words that I have a hard time defining or understanding. How can one identify or recognize righteousness? For my understanding, righteousness must be the way God intends things to be. In the New Testament, righteousness seems to be associated with fairness and equitable treatment of others. Integrity, virtue, piety, godliness—those are words used to reflect righteousness. Righteousness is about generosity, and goodness, and justice.

Now those are sort of grand words and grand and important concepts – words that we perhaps don’t consider much in our day to day living. But consider that this is the word Jesus uses at his baptism to usher in his years of public ministry. From that divine moment onward, Jesus had a ministry in which righteousness was part of all that he did. He called for justice, he treated people honestly and with fairness. He loved his neighbors, he respected the dignity of every human being, he honored God and worshipped, he was faithful in prayer and in witnessing to God’s presence. He lived as a servant and with humility. He offered and sought forgiveness.

Are these ways of righteousness starting to sound familiar? They ought to as they are a part of our baptismal covenant, the prayers we pray and promise whenever anyone is baptized. They are the promises made at our own baptisms.

The other day I was visiting with someone about worship and faithfulness and about studying and praying. And at some point they said, “Well, you are comfortable with all of this because

you live it.” But truly, it is about ALL of us living it. Because of our baptisms we are all called to the same ministry of righteousness that Jesus lived. We are all called to “live it.”

For consider this about our baptisms – Jesus was baptized in the Jordan River by John but John and Jesus both declare that Jesus himself will baptize everyone else with fire and the Holy Spirit. Now when we are baptized today we use water. But after the water each of us is anointed with sacred oil and these words are said, “You are sealed by the Holy Spirit in baptism and marked as Christ’s own forever.” You are sealed by the Holy Spirit and marked as Christ’s own forever.

Did you know that the word Messiah means anointed one? You may have noticed that several folks are anointed in the Old Testament when they are chosen or recognized for new ministries. Now I am not saying that anyone of us is the Messiah but I am saying that we have all been anointed and we have been anointed for a ministry of righteousness. We have been marked as Christ’s own forever.

Look again at the words in the reading today from Isaiah. Here is my servant, I am the Lord, I have called you in righteousness, I have taken you by the hand and kept you. I have given you as a covenant to the people, a light to the nations, to open the eyes that are blind, to bring out prisoners from the dungeon, for the prison those who sit in darkness. I am the Lord.....

Now these words in Isaiah were not written about Jesus for they are from the Old Testament, however, it is these words that Jesus read in the synagogue when he began his public ministry. And I say to you, as Christ’s disciples, as those marked as Christ’s own forever.... These too are our words.

We are called to the same ministry. We are called to live with righteousness when we pay our bills, when we visit with neighbors, when we work with colleagues, when we decide how to spend our time and our wealth, when face anger or disappointment, when we see unfair situations. We are called to share the good news of the gospel with people who are beaten down by their sadness and suffering. We proclaim freedom for prisoners of pain and despair. We bring people into God’s presence to receive his healing. We share other’s burdens of grief or chronic illness, and God uses us to ease oppression. Through our faithful ministries, God announces the coming time when all that is wrong will be made right and we will celebrate in Christ’s presence.

Let me close with a blessing from one of our Stephen Ministry training lessons.

May the Lord bless us and keep us; May he give us strength to help bear another’s burdens; May he give us patience so we can listen attentively and live righteously; May he give us healing words when we are called to speak; and may his love shine through in everything we do.”

Thanks be to God.