

Sermon Text: Philippians 1:2-11

Occasion: Second Sunday of Advent, 5 Dec 2021

Fruit of Baptism

Grace, mercy and peace be to you in the name of God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ.
Amen.

⁶ And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.... ⁹ And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment, ¹⁰ so that you may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, ¹¹ filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God. (Philippians 1)

When we meet John the Baptist preparing the way for Christ our Lord, we find him at the banks of the Jordan River. He is the voice of the one crying out in the wilderness to prepare the way of the Lord and make His paths straight. While John's ministry to do this is baptism, we find that the majority of John's words in our gospel reading (Luke 3:1-14) are not much concerned with dunking people in a river. No, the gospel reading features John the Baptist openly rebuking the people around him, such as calling them a brood of vipers...or, if you will, sons of snakes as opposed to dogs. John is crying out to people not to continue in sin but to live righteously. Repentance as the fruit of baptism is about turning from the path of evil to do that which is pleasing before God. John is preparing the way of the Lord by making our path less crooked.

But this is baptism we are talking about. Baptism is all about the Gospel, not about the condemnation of the Law. It is through baptism we escape from the judgmental threats of the Law. The Law may say we deserve hell for our sins but baptism gives us beautiful comfort from our Lord that He forgives our sins. The waters of baptism drown our sins and bring us forth into righteousness. The death of Christ rushes over us when the waters wash us clean from iniquity. The death Christ died, he died to sin once for all (Rom 6:10). When baptism drowns your sin, you have died to sin through Christ's death. As sin cannot live in Christ, neither can sin live in you. Sin is as dead as Christ was in the grave. The Law cannot condemn you when sin has already died in your flesh. Baptism releases you from the harshness of God's Law.

This being the case, why was John the Baptist laying down the Law when people were coming to him for baptism? Baptism should be a joyous thing where you are released from the Law, why would we return to it? Well, because baptism has done more than simply kill off our sin. Baptism has brought us forth into newness of life. As Christ has risen from the dead to live righteously before our God, so the life of Christ stirs within us so that we may imitate Christ. So, to be clear, imitating Christ's righteousness is not what saves our skins. We should imitate Christ in all that we do, but this is only because Christ first produced salvation within us through baptism. God

began a good work in you the moment you were baptized for He placed salvation within your heart. And the Lord will complete it by saving from death when He raises you to new glory in the resurrection to come.

Salvation is yours already, and God uses your salvation to produce good works for others (Php 2:12-13). Therefore, Christ's righteousness is yours already and the fruits of righteousness grow from it as good works. Fruit grows from baptism watering your faith. If you are in faith, that faith produces good works (James 2:26). So, yes, John the Baptist is telling us to live according to God's Law, but a careful distinction must be made: our relationship to the Law has changed. We are no longer fearful of failing the Law. To fail God's Law is the definition of sin, but all your sins were drowned in the forgiveness of your baptism. You are dead to sin by baptism, so how can you still live in sin? (Rom 6:2) You are no longer under fear of the Law and subject to its judgment. Rather, you live according to God's Law because it is the good and right thing to do. Baptism has joined you to the perfect life of Jesus Christ who fulfilled the Law. Be imitators of Christ by living according to the way of righteous—according to the way of the Lord.

This is what the reading from Philippians is all about. We know that God has begun a good work within us already. We know that God has brought you salvation and life in Christ through baptism. So, now we wish to continue to live in Christ's righteousness that we may be found pure and blameless when Christ returns. We want to produce the fruit of his righteousness to the glory and praise of God. John the Baptist was trying to prepare people to do this when Jesus came as the Messiah to the land of Israel. Now our Lord urges us through the scriptures to prepare ourselves for the Lord's second coming, when he will come to the whole earth.

But, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith upon the earth? (Luke 18:8) Jesus asked this very question. We know those who believe and are baptized will be saved, but those who do not believe will be condemned (Mark 16:16). If we truly desire to live out the Gospel given to us in our baptisms, we should spread the good news of new life in Christ to the ends of the earth. True joy does not lie with us being alone in heaven but in heaven being filled with all believers in Jesus Christ our Lord. There is great joy in knowing that we will be able to see and meet all people throughout history who were forgiven their sins through faith. There will also be joy in seeing those you love whom you have lost in this world. The good work that God has begun in you by your baptism is not limited to you.

Everyone who receives Christ in faith will be saved. This is the true meaning of Church fellowship. We are not simply people in a social club eating and drinking together. We are those who have received salvation in our Lord Jesus Christ and now share this salvation among us. Fellowship is about receiving the same blessings of grace, forgiveness, and salvation from death. All those who join together in the faith—whether in this congregation or another, whether in this country or another, whether in this world or heaven—all of us are united in the salvation of Jesus

Christ and rejoice in the coming resurrection from the dead. And this is why we wish to display the fruits of righteousness in our lives.

We do not want to be the only ones who have fellowship in Christ's salvation. We do not want to be alone in heaven. The Lord desires all people to be saved and come to knowledge of the true faith (1 Tim 2:4). All of us who share in fellowship in the faith should also share in this desire of our God. We want all people to be saved and be found side by side with us in the resurrection. This is about going out and proclaiming Christ's forgiveness. And this is also about living in Christ's forgiveness by forgiving others. Even the worst of our enemies need the love of Christ. You have received forgiveness in Christ through your baptism. And they also need to be forgiven in a baptism like yours so they will be partakers of grace like you. You may not be perfect in showing this grace to others, but God who works salvation in you can use you to bring His salvation to others.

Whatever faults you may have in living out your salvation, we know that even if we fail to see fruit grow in this world, God will still save all those whom He has saved through His Son. The one who has begun a good work in you through baptism will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ. We do not need to fear our personal failures nor the shame of sin. Through faith, we receive the salvation of our Lord Jesus Christ and this cannot be taken away from us by any power of this world. God will bring us forth along the way of righteousness—the way of the Lord—into His salvation. The life of Christ given to you in baptism will raise you from death and usher you forth into Christ's eternal kingdom. You are assured of your salvation.

The good fruit you bear is still good. You should still live according to the Law of the Lord for you are strengthened by the Gospel. The judgment of the Law is no threat to you. Whether the witness of the Gospel does not bring flocks of people to you to be baptized does not matter. As long as the Gospel is preached in its purity and faithfulness, the word of the Lord will do its work. God's word does not return to Him void but accomplishes that which He has ordained it to do (Isa 55:11). You never know what might happen in your sight or out of your sight with the word of God. Perhaps someone will come to faith with your preaching, or perhaps not and that person will simply repeat the Gospel to someone who will believe and be saved. What we do know is that the good Lord has begun His good work in each and every believer and He will bring us into the resurrection of the dead. This promise was given to you in your baptism, and the Lord will do it. Amen.

The peace that surpasses all understanding guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.