

Today in the church calendar we celebrate the Baptism of Jesus. This means that like last week there will be two parts of this sermon. My part, the sermon and our part a Baptism Renewal Service.

Baptism is celebrated all over the world and in many different ways. Just look at how baptism happens in the country of Georgia.

**VIDEO HERE**

Don't worry, I'm not practicing to perform those types of baptisms.

In her book, "The Hiding Place" Corrie ten Boom tells the story of a Dutch Christian family, her family. A family with a heart for Jewish people

Her grandfather Wilhelm ten Boon started a weekly prayer group in 1844 in the city of Haarlem, near Amsterdam. The purpose of this group? The salvation of the Jews. This weekly prayer meeting continued uninterrupted until 1944. That's when the ten Boon family was sent to a concentration camp for helping Jews to flee from the Nazi persecution in Holland.

In her book, Corrie shares a story about her father Caspar ten Boon. When Jews were forced to wear the "Star of David," Casper lined up for one too. He wore the star because he wanted to identify himself with the Jews. After all, his family prayed for and with Jews for so many years.

Casper so completely identified with the Jews, he was willing to wear a sign of shame and suffer persecution for the sake of the people he loved. Casper chose to wear the Star even when he didn't have to.

This morning's Gospel reading from Luke is in the lectionary. It is a very short description of Jesus' baptism. It's one of the reasons why I have beef with the lectionary. I'm sure its creators

had their hearts in the right place. But these meager verses don't really do the whole story justice. I will use my weekly devotion spot to dig into that more.

But for today we'll stick with the lectionary, particularly vs 21-22. Jesus is baptized. Jesus didn't need to be baptized. He was sinless. He had nothing to repent of. So why in the world did he do it? Why did Jesus get baptized? Smart commentarians will tell you things like, this was a sign of Jesus' complete dedication to following the will of God. They will say that this baptism announces the beginning of Jesus' earthly ministry and finally they will tell us that Jesus was trying to set an example to us.

And I think in each case they are right. But I think there might be something more in Jesus reasoning. Maybe, just maybe this sinless Son of God was baptized because of love. Jesus, the Son of God, loved us so much that he wanted to identify with us. Just like Caspar ten Boon wore the Star of David to identify with the Jews.

There's more. Jesus wasn't only identifying with the Jews of the day he was identifying with the Gentiles. Back in first century Judea, baptism would be a shock to a religious Jew. Jews didn't typically undergo a baptism of repentance for sins. Only when a Gentile wanted to become a Jew would a baptism occur. Then the Gentile and his entire house would be baptized.

Jesus accepted this baptism by John the Baptist as if he were "a Gentile dog". Scandalous! See, I just taught you a slur from the first century.

So what is the significance of Jesus identifying with us in His baptism? What practically does it mean to us today?

I think a few answers can be found in Hebrews chapter 4:

Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to

sympathize with our weaknesses. No, we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are--yet was without sin. Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.

Jesus has identified so completely with us, that we can approach Him with total confidence that he will understand us and is interested in all we do in our lives.

Jesus isn't on the balcony; he has joined us on the road.

I visited my Aunt and Uncle last May. They live in Keokuk, IA and their house overlooks the Mississippi river. Below the house, between the river and their house is the Great River Road. Standing on their deck gives you a view of the river and that road.

As long as I stood on the deck and looked down at the cars driving on that road, the road was no use to me – other than a conversation piece.

The road could only be useful if I left the deck and started driving on that road.

Jesus joins us on the road of our journey through life. Jesus is interested in every and I mean every aspect of our lives – our joys and sorrows, our successes and failures.

Jesus identified with us - at his baptism and more completely on the Cross. That gives us permission to approach His Throne of Grace with all of our fears and all of our anxieties. Let's not be afraid to come to Him. Jesus is not some distant Deity that set the world spinning and took off with a "tata for now", "get on with it".

We have a savior who forever will let us approach the throne of grace with confidence. We have a savior who forever offers us mercy and grace in our time of need." All of this church family, is given to us without price. Let us pray.

And now we'll move into our Baptismal Renewal liturgy.