

The First Sunday after the Epiphany:  
The Baptism of Christ  
January 12, 2014  
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## Called to Righteousness

Each one of the four gospels tells us about Jesus' baptism. For Mark and John, our Lord's baptism really is the beginning of the story. In John, those who first become disciples of Jesus had been with John; they had to leave John the Baptist and follow Jesus. The Baptist tells them, *"He must increase and I must decrease..."*

Matthew gives us a couple of interesting details about Jesus' baptism. He reports the Baptist's reluctance. John thought Jesus should be the one baptizing. And Matthew tells us that Jesus insists on John's baptism by saying, *"Let it be so now; for it is proper for us in this way to fulfill all righteousness."* When John hears this, he consents and baptizes Jesus.

Righteousness is one of Matthew's favorite words. Jesus uses "righteousness" three times in the Sermon on the Mount, including when Jesus says, *"...unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees you will never enter the Kingdom of Heaven."* (5:20)

God is known for righteousness and God's people must be righteous as well. Righteousness is simply doing what is right. Righteousness is the opposite of sin. In the world, righteousness is justice – how we relate to each other. Only righteousness leads to God's Kingdom. Righteousness is found in our relationships with one another, in how we treat and respect one another.

John the Baptist criticized Herod and the religious authorities because they perverted relationships; they abused relationships; they cared more for power than for people.

The promises we make at baptism are all about relationships. We promise to be part of the church community and actively participate in Eucharistic worship. We promise to share the good news of God in Christ with others. We promise to respect the dignity of every person.

I think this righteousness as we see it in relationships is what creates a healthy, growing spirituality and helps our parish to carry forth our mission goals.

Think of the relationships in our worship leaders – choirs, acolytes, Altar Guild, LEMs, ushers. Leslie, Elizabeth and I begin most weekday mornings together praying the Daily Office. This relationship of prayer helps us to be your priests.

In two weeks, we will elect new Vestry members. The relationship our elected Vestry leaders have together is fundamental for the life and mission of our church. We hope that our pastoral care and counseling helps individuals to grow in healthy relationships – marriage – parenting – helping aging parents – dealing with conflict and communication.

When I hear Jesus talk about righteousness I know he is talking about relationships.

What relationships need your efforts in this new calendar year? Who needs support? Who needs encouragement? Who needs forgiveness? Who needs healing?

Jesus came to John for baptism to fulfill righteousness. This was the relationship Jesus knew would help change the world. John the Baptist is the link between the old and the new – between the law and the prophets and the grace of God in Jesus.

We have seven more Sundays in this year's Epiphany season – a longer Epiphany than most because Lent doesn't begin until the first Wednesday in March. As we travel with Jesus, let us pay close attention to his relationships. Ultimately we believe Jesus died for us. He went to Jerusalem, went to the cross so that all the world would know God's love is stronger than evil and death.

The cross is the sign of God's love inviting us to share in this love. Our call to righteousness is a call to make Christ's love the basis of all our relationships.

Isaiah 42:1-9

Psalm 29:1-6, 11

Acts 10:34-43

Matthew 3:13-17