

*13Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan, to be baptized by him. 14John would have prevented him, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?" 15But Jesus answered him, "Let it be so now; for it is proper for us in this way to fulfill all righteousness." Then he consented. 16And when Jesus had been baptized, just as he came up from the water, suddenly the heavens were opened to him and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him. 17And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased."*

What if they gave you your grade at the beginning? Before the first lecture, before you had opened a book, have done any homework, written any papers, taken any tests – what if you received an A right at the beginning? Would you still study, still read the assignments, still get to class on time or at all? Would you still take notes and try to understand and remember the material?

I suppose it would all depend on why you were in the class. Because it was required? Because the law said you had to be there? If you were in the class because you wanted to learn what was being taught then getting the grade first might be helpful. You could concentrate on learning and forget about anyone evaluating you.

I was baptized when I was four months old. Before I even knew there was a God, God had decided about me – gave me my final grade – the highest grade attainable. Child of God is what God named me – Christian, one who belongs to Christ. The grade that belongs to Jesus was given to me right at the beginning – before I had even prayed my first prayer.

The same is true of you – whenever you were baptized – you were given everything that belongs to Jesus – all of his honor as a child of God – all of his eternal life that began on Easter morning. All the joy God has in Jesus God has in you. Everything is yours right from the moment of your baptism. So now what? I suppose all depends on what it means to us to belong to God. Is belonging important to us just for the rewards – just for the honor and the life and the glory? Or is God and God's way important to us?

Right at the beginning of his ministry this is what happened to Jesus: he was baptized and the heavens opened and a voice from heaven declared, “This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased.” Not only that but before the voice spoke the Holy Spirit descended upon Jesus – like a dove it came down and alighted on him.

And then? Jesus sought to do the will of his Father in heaven.

I suppose Jesus could have sought something else – good income, a vacation home on the sea, a faithful wife, lots of entertainment during leisure time. God’s verdict had been pronounced – Jesus was in – loved, a Son, God was pleased with him - time to kick back and take it easy.

But Jesus sought to do the will of his Father in heaven.

Was he foolish to seek God’s will? It led him to a demanding life – long hours – lots of needy people – disciples who so very often disappointed him, crowds liked to be near him yet who did not follow when the going got tough. To judge whether Jesus was foolish depends on what you and I think life is all about? Are we just looking for a grade or is growing and learning and seeking God important to us? Is just being the way we are good enough or do we want the wholeness and holiness that God alone can create in us?

For Jesus God’s way was everything. The writer of the letter to the Hebrews tells us that “although Jesus was a Son he learned obedience through what he suffered and having been made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him.” Sometimes we put all the emphasis on the eternal salvation part of that sentence and miss the being made perfect through what he suffered. Could God hope for that kind of perfection for us as well – that you and I would grow and mature in love and service and suffering?

I know what I want for the ones I love – not that they hit the lottery and have it easy ever after but that they face challenges and learn to be courageous and to live by faith rather than by fear. I want them to be people upon whom others can depend – people who give themselves for others. If they should have an easy life and be happy but only were concerned for themselves I would be disappointed. If they should have a hard life but learn to love and give themselves in costly ways I would have joy.

I think that is how God must think about Jesus and about us. How we live may not change whether God will love us or save us – God has already pledged that God will – but as we seek God’s way and God’s will for our lives we become whole. And that is good. May God grant it. Amen.