

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."

I remember getting stuck in the snow. I was a new driver, pushing down on the accelerator seemed a great way to move forward. A little more gas, I'll move forward. But the spinning was only faster, the hole my tire was digging growing deeper, more smoothly polished. The more I tried, the worst became my situation.

John the Baptist came baptizing with water for repentance. The word repent means, to turn.

Turn your life around.

I've tried it. How many times I've said, "I'm going to be different from now on." "I won't be so judgmental." "I'll watch my diet." "I won't let words that hurt slip from my mouth." "I'll try harder."

Always I make these promises to myself when I am stuck in some way - stuck in sadness, or stuck in the consequences of a bad decision. Already my wheels are spinning and what do I decide to do? Push down on the accelerator some more, try harder. And the wheels only spin faster.

A baptism of repentance. Is that what God wants from us? Then we Christians can be the people who are always doing our best, trying our hardest. Am I discouraged? I'll try harder. Do I lose my temper? I'll try harder. Is my life going out of control? I'll try harder. I'll turn up my power, I'll promise that I'll do better, I'll put that accelerator to the floor.

No wonder John did not think Jesus needed this baptism. Jesus wasn't stuck like everyone else. But Jesus convinced him to go ahead. And when Jesus baptism was over and Jesus had come up out of the water, then took place another sort of baptism all together.

Suddenly the heavens were opened to him and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him. Everything that hides God from us, separates God from us was pushed aside for Jesus. God's own Spirit came to rest on him, remained upon him. And then

God announced to all the world and to us: “This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased.”

This was not a baptism of trying harder, applying more of our power, turning, turning, turning. This was the almighty God announcing God's pleasure in Jesus. God spirit would lead him, direct him, empower him. Satan's tempting would not dig a hole from which Jesus could not escape, nor would a friend's betrayal, the cross' nails, the chill of the grave. God's spirit would keep Jesus on the road even when all the world would judge him wrecked and stuck in death. The heavens remained open to Jesus.

“People say, ‘God will not give you more than you can bear,’” she told Sue. They had met some years ago when Sue had visited her after her surgery for breast cancer. Things had gone well for her until now. But now the cancer was back, and what people say did not sound so convincing to her. Her statement was really a question, “Is it true God will not give you more than you can bear?” The cancer's coming back was a deep drift and her wheels were spinning. And Sue answered, “The strength and the power you need are not in you but from God.”

The strength and the power you need are not in you but from God. We think John's baptism will be enough. We'll make it if we but try hard enough. That is not true; life often confronts us with far more than we can bear. But you have been baptized with the baptism of Jesus.

God has opened heaven for you, planted God's own Spirit in you. God declares of you, “You are my child; with you I am well pleased.” God will never change God's mind about that. That is what God declares and promises in these waters. God will never change God's mind about you. Not even if you have been like me pushing that old accelerator as hard as you can thinking you can do it on your own. You are still and always God's child.

But there are so many drifts ahead, how will God ever get me through?

Sometimes we are like Jesus that night in the Garden of Gethsemane - so many drifts of suffering ahead - so high we cannot see over them. We look up as Jesus did that night and there is no dove descending; only the dark clouds of an approaching storm. Jesus prayed that night, he looked for friends to wait with him; they slept. Jesus prayed, Jesus prayed.

He trusted the heavens were open when all sight told him they were closed. His trust was not in vain. God raised Jesus from the dead.

When you were baptized your life and Jesus' life became one, bound together in water and God's word. Everything Jesus is and has done is yours – today - in this moment - in every tomorrow - forever.

This morning Kristin is being bound to Jesus. Not John's baptism but baptism into Jesus is hers. We pray for her that she will live in Jesus' baptism. We pray that her life will forever be in Christ, not in her own power and strength, but in Christ – today - in this moment - in every tomorrow - forever.

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