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Our Saviour Lutheran Church
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Baptism of Our Lord

Let us pray...May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, for you are our strength and you are most certainly our redeemer. AMEN.

Sisters and brothers in Christ, have you ever stopped and wondered how Jesus did it?

I mean, have you ever wondered how Jesus had the courage to set his eyes on Jerusalem and go to the cross?

Have you ever wondered how Jesus mustered the mettle to travel the path all the way to Golgotha?

Have you ever wondered how Jesus did it?

I mean, as the Son of God he knew what God's will was for his life that he was to suffer and die by crucifixion.

But as Jesus the person, he was a human being susceptible to fear and doubt.

So one would think that sheer dread in face of the cross would set in and immobilize him.

So, how did Jesus do it?

My answer to the conundrum is baptism.

My answer to the question is that Jesus was baptized.

Jesus was able to go to the cross because he was baptized.

As one who was baptized, Jesus had the courage, had the "License to Take Risks," even the risk of going to the cross.

PAUSE

It is kind of the having a Justice League of America Membership Card in one's wallet.

Now, I never had such a thing when I grew up.

But apparently it was something of a rave for kids to obtain this membership card.

I assume kids applied for the card following details on back of superhero comic books.

And on the front of the card was the depiction of Wonder Woman, Superman, and Batman, with the words “Justice League of America: Official Member.”

On the back of the card were the words “The owner of this card is an official member of the Justice League of America,” with a box underneath for one’s signature.

And I can only imagine that having possession of the card provided kids with a sense of empowerment.

I imagine that kids felt that they themselves were superheroes, too.

I imagine that kids felt that now with card in hand they had a sort of “License to Take Risks,” all in the name of justice.

PAUSE

Today, we have something similar to the Justice League of America Membership Card floating around.

Do you know that of which I am referring?

We call it a Vaccination Card.

And on the card it reads “Covid-19 Vaccination Record Card,” with the admonition “Please keep this record card, which includes medical information about the vaccines you have received.”

Then there is a place for our name, date of birth, and patient number.

Underneath that information are spaces for the listing of when we received doses of the vaccine.

And yes, in truth, I kind of equate the Vaccination card to the Justice League of America Membership Card.

Because with our vaccination card, we are given “License to Take Risks.”

We are given license to travel, to board planes, or to go across borders.

We are given license to enter certain businesses, restaurants and gyms.

So on and so forth.

With the vaccination card listing our updated record of vaccinations, we have more freedom of travel and entry into places of business.

With the vaccination card we have our “License to Take Risks.”

Why? Because we are less likely to be affected adversely by the coronavirus, and we are less likely to spread the disease.

PAUSE

But back to our original question.

Why Jesus is able to set his sights on Jerusalem and travel to the place of crucifixion is because Jesus has the “License to Take Risks.”

He is not a card carrying member of the Justice League of America.

Nor does he not have his vaccination card up-to-date.

No, but Jesus is baptized.

And baptism is the assurance of God’s grace in the face of whatever great trials the world should happen to throw at us.

PAUSE

Today, in our gospel reading we observe again the baptism of our Lord.

We observe again the event in which the heavens were opened, and the Spirit descended like a dove, and a voice proclaimed to Jesus, “You are my Son, the Beloved, with you I am well pleased.”

Today we observe again Jesus’ baptism.

And from time immemorial, people have wondered, “Why did Jesus need to be baptized?”

He was God’s Son already.

And, Jesus did not need to be cleansed of his sins in baptism like the rest of us.

Why did Jesus need to be baptized?

And I think the answer is two-fold.

First, Jesus' baptism reassured Jesus' human side.

Baptism reassured Jesus' human side that God's grace abided with him, such that he had the "License to Take Risks."

He had the "License to Take Risks," knowing that even in his doubt and fear God the Father was there to support him with promise of grace.

And second, I think Jesus was baptized as a witness to us in our own baptism.

Yes, this Sunday of the Baptism of our Lord is meant to be a reminder of our own baptism.

It is meant to be a reminder that we, too, have the "License to Take Risks" not because of our vaccination card nor because of any other card in our wallet.

No, we have the "License to Take Risks," because we are baptized.

PAUSE

And in my whimsical mind I wonder if maybe then instead of issuing a person a Baptismal Certificate at the time of their baptism, we ought to issue a Baptism Membership Card.

On the front we could put a picture not of Wonder Woman, Superman, and Batman, but a picture of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, with the words "Official Baptismal Member."

On the back would be the words, "The owner of this card is an official member of the Church of Christ with all the privileges and responsibility thereof."

And underneath would be a box for our signature.

That could be fun, don't you think?

PAUSE

Of course, that "License to Take Risks," that comes with baptism, is not a license to be careless with our lives.

Baptism is not a license to engage in things like driving at excessive speeds, or recklessly spending money, or turning a blind eye to the consequences of drinking or promiscuous sex, and the like.

No, the “License to Take Risks” is not that kind of license.

It is not foolishness.

No, the “License to Take Risks” that comes with baptism is the license to live out our faith bodily.

It is the license to be courageous for the sake of the gospel.

It is the license to embrace the callings we receive from God and not shy away.

For, in truth, God is always calling us even now.

No doubt, right now, God is calling us to serve in some new way within in the life of the church.

Perhaps, God is calling us to be on a particular committee or to become a member of council.

Perhaps, God is calling us to help out with Family Promise or to participate in some other work of social ministry, so as to care for the neighbors in need around us.

Perhaps, God is calling us to step up and offer ourselves on Sunday morning as a reader, or an usher, or as one who helps prepare the altar, or who provides refreshments, or as one who might lend our voice in singing a special anthem.

Perhaps, God is calling us to invite others to worship, to tell our friends or neighbors that we will even pick them up for church.

Perhaps, God is calling us to check in on our homebound members.

Perhaps, God is calling us to call or to visit those members who are infirmed or lonely.

Perhaps, God is calling us to be present with others in their specific time of need, when facing surgery or a difficult prognosis.

Or, perhaps, God is simply calling us to pray through our membership list, to pray through our prayer list in the bulletin, to pray for our elected officials, to pray for the concerns we hear on the nightly news.

Perhaps, God is calling us in these or in other ways.

To be sure, God is always calling us.

For that is the constant work of the Spirit of God.

Martin Luther said that that is what the Spirit of God does.

The Spirit calls to us.

And the “License to Take Risks” then is not about carelessly even foolishly putting life and limb in jeopardy.

The “License to Take Risks” is about heeding the call of the Spirit to do the work of the gospel knowing that we will make mistakes in our effort.

The “License to Take Risks” is having the knowledge that we are forgiven by God even before we attempt anything in service to the gospel.

That is the liberty baptism affords us. It is the call to sin boldly, but rejoice in the Lord more boldly still.

We will always falter or make mistakes in our effort to serve God, so Luther says, “Sin boldly, take those risks anyway, but rejoice in the Lord more boldly still.”

Baptism affords us the grace of God so as to say, “I will serve my God in this way... I feel called by the Spirit to do such and such...and if I fail in my effort, if I fall short of accomplishing the task, God forgives me already, God has redeemed me already, so what have I to fear, what have I to doubt.”

This...this is how then I understand Jesus’ courage by which Jesus was then able to follow his call to go to the cross.

Jesus was baptized.

God’s grace was always then with him, every step of the way to Jerusalem, every step of the way to Golgotha, every step of the way to the beams of the cross.

Jesus was baptized.

In a sense then, God had already redeemed him from death, even before he died on the cross, because God's promise was already there.

PAUSE

This then is the same assurance we have in life because of baptism.

Every step we take, God's grace goes with us.

Every step we take, God's promise is already there.

We need not be weighed down with fear nor with doubt.

Indeed, the only unfaithful step of the Christian is not to take that bold step.

The only unfaithful step of the Christian is not to heed the call of the Spirit, but to turn an indifferent ear.

The only unfaithful step of the Christian is not to embrace our baptism.

The only unfaithful step of the Christian is to forget our "License to Take Risks."

PAUSE

I remind us that Luther himself every morning when he woke, reminded himself of his "License to Take Risks."

He didn't do so by taking out his Baptism Membership Card from his wallet.

I don't even know if they had wallets back then.

No, Luther remembered his "License to Take Risks" every morning by making the sign of the cross on his forehead when he woke up.

Each morning he would make the sign of the cross remembering that he was a baptized child of God.

And in the same way, we are to remember our baptism.

We are to listen then faithfully to the call of the Spirit, and we are to respond knowing that even in our missteps God forgives us and God empowers us again by the grace of his Son Jesus Christ and power of the cross. Thanks be to God.
Amen.