

Show following film clip: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=59I0BTUDPq8>

“We are all just one small adjustment away from making our lives work.”

Be mindful of how looking at a situation from a slightly different angle can make a huge difference in how one lives their life. Our next Scripture lesson is coming from the gospel of Luke. The text we are reading comes after Luke has given us all of the stories that we are familiar with at Christmas.

The gospel writer Luke has told us stories about Elizabeth and her giving birth to John the Baptist even though she was very old. Luke provides for us the story about Mary becoming pregnant and then giving birth to Jesus. Luke shares the stories of the shepherds as well as Simeon and Anna who bless the young child. Luke has all of that before he moves us into the story we have today of the baptism of Jesus.

Luke’s telling us about the baptism of Jesus after stories about the birth is similar to the gospel writer Matthew. Matthew is focused on Joseph and Wise Men and Jesus being forced to move to Egypt after his birth. So both the gospels of Matthew and Luke tell us about the baby Jesus and then move us into the story about the baptism of Jesus.

The gospels of John and Mark, however, also include this story about the baptism of Jesus but they place this story at a different place. In both John and Mark, the baptism of Jesus is at the very beginning of their accounts about the life of Jesus. John and Mark share nothing about Jesus’ birth. So for the gospel writers John and Mark they see the baptism of Jesus as the starting point of telling their audience about Jesus.

So let’s read Luke’s version of this story.

**Read Luke 3:15-22**

In our opening clip, the male character says to his date that “we are just one small adjustment away from making our lives really work.” One small adjustment from making our lives work. So what small adjustment are we invited to make today? I take us back to the story that Luke shares with us. The story of the baptism of Jesus.

In this story as told by Luke, we are not told that John the Baptist is the one who does the actual baptizing of Jesus. We are told that in other gospels but not in Luke. In fact, we are told just before the baptism that John is arrested and sent to prison.

Also, In Luke’s account, Jesus’ baptism is not a solitary act. Jesus is not alone when he is baptized. Jesus is with “all the people.” In his baptism, Jesus is in solidarity with sinners like you and me.

In Luke’s telling of this story, there is one fact that he seems to want his readers to hear very clearly. After Jesus is baptized did you notice what he does next in the story? Luke is the only gospel that records Jesus doing this act. After Jesus is baptized with all the people, Jesus responds to his baptism by praying.

I think this act of prayer is very important to Luke and that is why he includes it. Jesus is baptized and then he turns to God in prayer. And this will not be the last time that we hear in Luke about Jesus praying.

In Luke’s account, Jesus prays before he calls his disciples. Jesus prays before asking his disciples who he is. Jesus prays when he is transfigured. Jesus prays before teaching his disciples to pray. Jesus prays on the night of his arrest and Jesus prays at his death. In Luke’s account, prayer is at the heart of Jesus’ ministry.

In our story before us, while he is praying Jesus looks up to the heavens and hears a voice. We don’t know from Luke if others hear this voice but Jesus hears this voice while he is praying. The voice comes to him as the Spirit descending like a dove and says to Jesus, “You are my Son, the loved one. With you I am well pleased.”

When Jesus comes up from the waters of baptism in the Jordan River and hears these words while he is praying, these are not just words spoken to Jesus. At this point Jesus stands in those waters for all of us. Remember that in Luke's version Jesus is baptized with "all the people."

Jesus hears these words spoken to him and invites us to hear these words spoken to us as well. And the words that the Spirit speaks to you through the waters of baptism are these words. "You are my child. My son or my daughter. You are loved. God is pleased with you."

What is the small adjustment in our life that we are invited to make? The small adjustment that we are invited to make is an invitation to pray like Jesus and be open to hearing these words being said to you. To hear the voice of the Holy Spirit say to you, "You are my child. You are my son or daughter. You are loved by God. God is pleased with you."

So many of us never hear for ourselves that we are loved. Maybe we never heard that from a parent. Maybe we never hear those words from a spouse or ex-spouse. Maybe we never hear those words from our kids or siblings. But through the baptism of Jesus and the invitation to our own baptism we are invited to hear those words said to us.

You are God's precious child. You are loved. God is proud of you.

The small adjustment that we may be being invited to make is to live our lives under this banner. Not under the banner that others may be trying to make us live under. Those course words that we may have heard from parents, bosses, siblings, or other family members.

Those words like you are nothing. You will amount to nothing. You can't do it. That's beyond you. You are not as good as your brother or sister. You have failed in some way. You are a loser. And on and on those negative words which we may have heard all of our lives.

Through the baptism of Jesus we are also invited to reject those words of negativity which are said about others. Those voices of anger and fear that cause people to demonize those that are different from them in some way. We are invited to hear the positive words of God and reject those voices of fear and intimidation which are so prevalent in our culture.

Through the baptism of Jesus we are invited to pray and to listen in our prayers to a different set of words. Words that say to you that you are God's child. You are precious and loved. God is proud of you. We are invited to hear God say those same words to the person that you may most fear or that you see as your enemy in some way.

Make a small adjustment this year. Hear that you are precious and precious in the eyes of God. Invite others to hear those words said to them as well.

And hear that maybe you are the one to share those words to another. Words that remind all of us that we are God's sons and daughters. We are loved by God. God is proud of us. AMEN.

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-Given: January 10, 2016 in Allison Creek Presbyterian (York, SC)