

## Title: “His Love. Your Baptism.”

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Romans 13:8-10 & Matthew 18:1-20

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**Lesson:** *Live daily in your Baptism and serve others; lead them into a life with Christ, a life lived at the foot of the cross.*

### Message:

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.

Can you remember the last time you put together a puzzle? The box cover contained the picture - the goal of your challenge and inside were hundreds or thousands of pieces, each one containing just a small portion of the bigger picture. Now, everyone has their own strategy and some like to separate the outer edges from the rest of the pieces and then put those together, first. It allows them some sort of direction, some sort of anchor for the rest of the inner pieces. Others like to focus on portions of the picture and connect all of those pieces at one time. Still others start by sorting the pieces into various groups: by color, or potential location within the puzzle, or whatever. The reason that I bring this all up is because the Gospel reading today might invoke memories of the last puzzle you tried to piece together.

First, there is a discussion about the greatest and Jesus answers with talk of a child:

**18** At that time the disciples came to Jesus, saying, “Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?” <sup>2</sup> And calling to him a child, he put him in the midst of them <sup>3</sup> and said, “Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. <sup>4</sup> Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.

<sup>5</sup> “Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me, <sup>6</sup> but whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin,<sup>Ⓜ</sup> it would be better for him to have a great millstone fastened around his neck and to be drowned in the depth of the sea.

Next, Jesus seems to change the subject as he begins to talk about the temptations of sin in a person’s life. Immediately after that he switches topics to discuss lost sheep. Starting in verse 10:

<sup>10</sup> “See that you do not despise one of these little ones. For I tell you that in heaven their angels always see the face of my Father who is in heaven.<sup>Ⓜ</sup> <sup>12</sup> What do you think? If a man has a hundred sheep, and one of them has gone astray, does he not leave the ninety-nine on the mountains and go in search of the one that went astray? <sup>13</sup> And if he finds it, truly, I say to you, he rejoices over it more than over the ninety-nine that never went astray. <sup>14</sup> So it is not the will of my<sup>Ⓜ</sup> Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish.

And then, if that were not confusing enough, he lays out a set of rules for dealing with a brother who has faulted you. And then he ends with this:

<sup>18</sup> Truly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed<sup>u</sup> in heaven. <sup>19</sup> Again I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. <sup>20</sup> For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them.”

SPOILER ALERT: Next week the Gospel passage will pick up with the very next verse with Peter asking Jesus how many times he must forgive his brother.

What are we to make of all this? Each portion seems to be a separate piece of a larger puzzle and each piece seems to be located as far apart from the other as possible. How can they all fit together in one frame and what kind of picture do they together paint? We don't have the box cover to look at so let me describe the picture to you.

The picture is titled “His Love. Your Baptism.” and the vantage point is from heaven. You are in the center, standing in the middle of a gently flowing river. Above you is heaven and God seated on his throne. Jesus is standing to his right and with one hand is directing the Holy Spirit to descend upon you and take residence in your heart. With the other hand he is pointing you to the source of that river - the cross where he was crucified. He is reminding you that the blood he shed, the blood he willingly shed for you is now the baptismal river that washes you clean. And it washes you clean not only by washing *over* you but by washing *through* you. You have been reborn, your old self has been buried with Christ in his tomb and your new self has been raised from the dead. You are not simply “cleaned” you are reborn.

And just as the river washes through you, so too should love. It should flow from the Holy Spirit out of you and into the world. In Paul's word's from today's Epistle reading,

“You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” <sup>10</sup> Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law.”

And *that* is how all of these pieces come together. We are the greatest when we humble ourselves and serve others. When we focus on the work that Christ has called us to complete, we spend less time gaining the world and more time saving others from it. We chase after every person who we find straying away from God and we walk with them, guide and encourage them and help lead them back to Christ. And we do that with *everyone* we meet. As Paul says, “if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink.” And when we find that we have been faulted, we confront them - not for vengeance or repayment but for the sole purpose of bringing them back into relationship with Christ. The goal is not recompense to us but reconciliation to God. And this is so difficult to do, nearly impossible without this baptismal union that we have with Christ.

You see, that is the picture that is painted today, the one that is on our box is not just a still image or a snapshot in time. It is a living story of grace and mercy. One that shows what Christ has accomplished for us on the cross and how we are to respond. It is a living story of relationships between God and us and between us and each other. And it is a story that pulls us back to the cross

every time we fail, every time we fall short of God's expectations for us. It is a story where at the cross we are reminded of our baptism and life that we now live in Christ. And finally, it is a story of the triune God - a story that he allows us to participate in.

Can you see your life on the cover of that box?

Please pray with me.

Lord,

Through our baptism we have become adopted sons of God. Through our baptism we have received the Holy Spirit which now kindles inside of us the knowledge of God and a desire to point others to Him. Work in us to extend your kingdom to the four corners of the earth through the relationships we foster and the acts that we do. In your name we pray.

. Amen.