

Written Copy: Matthew 3:13-15 “Standing in Your Place”

The 1st Sunday @ Epiphany: The Baptism of Our Lord

Sunday, January 11th, 2026

Text: Matthew 3:13-15

¹³ Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to John, to be baptized by him. ¹⁴ John would have prevented him, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?" ¹⁵ But Jesus answered him, "Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness." Then he consented.

Exegetical Statement

John is by the Jordan River preaching, calling people to repent of their sin and be baptized as a sign of that repentance. He does this in preparation for the Messiah who is coming to reward those in right standing with God but punish the unrepentant wicked. And then this Messiah, Jesus of Nazareth comes on the scene, and He wants John to baptize Him. John wants to prevent this from happening because this is the One who is so great John isn't even worthy to do the most menial of tasks. John knows Jesus has no sin to repent of. John on the other hand does, He needs to be baptized by this greater one Jesus. But Jesus tells him that this is the proper thing to do now in order to accomplish all that is necessary for God's plan of salvation. Therefore, John gives in and baptizes Him. As Jesus comes up from the water the heavens open and the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove descends and comes upon Him, remaining upon Him. And the voice of the Father from heaven gives witness, "This is My Son, whom I love. I am well-pleased with Him, with everything that He does."

Focus Statement:

God the Son came down and became one of us to stand in our place. He stood in our place living the life we could not. He stood in our place receiving our baptism so that He could be intimately connected to us through ours. His perfect life was washed onto you, and your sin was washed onto Him, all of it. He took all that sin and removed it forever as your atoning sacrifice. It was buried with Him never to be raised again. By faith our sins go to Him and His perfect life of right standing is credited to you. And His resurrection promises our Last Day Resurrection.

Function Statement:

Why it's important to know:

We desire to be presentable before God, but our constant sinning in thought, word, and action makes us soiled. Even after we confess and repent, sin is never far behind. If it was left up to us, we would never be presentable before God.

What the hearer should do as a result:

Continue to examine your life and repent of your sin, not to make yourself presentable before God, Jesus has already done that by standing in your place. But as the Spirit's means to keep us ever growing in faith toward Christ, believing that He stood in your place as your Savior, and growing in faith and love toward Him and one another.

Subject Sentence: Jesus stood in your place to make you presentable

Introduction: We Want to Be Presentable

How many of you, whenever you are going out somewhere, will at some point before you leave check yourself in the mirror? Why do we do that? We want to make sure we are presentable. We give thought to how we look because it matters what others think of us. Say for example before you came to Church this morning: perhaps you showered, shaved, put on makeup, combed your hair, trimmed your mustache and beard, dressed in clothes that look nice, put on some nice shoes, then checked yourself in the mirror one more time before you headed out the door.

Now there are those that cultivate the grungy unkept look. They follow the fashion statement of hair being kind of disheveled, shirt kind of baggy and hanging out, jeans that have holes in the knees. They kind of look the opposite of those who dress up to go out. But even then, they check themselves in the mirror to make sure they are presentable.

No matter what look you are cultivating, you check to make sure that you look presentable according to the style of your peers. And no matter whether you are dressing up or dressing down, you probably check the mirror to make sure you don't have any boogers hanging down or anything caught between your teeth.

Have you ever showed up someplace only to find yourself underdressed for the occasion? I did on the Sunday that my oldest daughter was confirmed. I didn't grow up in the Lutheran Church, so I never went through Confirmation. Now normally at my home Church everybody dressed casual yet respectful. By that I mean I usually came to Church wearing a nice clean pair of jeans and a nice shirt. But on that Sunday, as I stood up there with my daughter, all dressed in her white confirmation gown, and with the parents of the other confirmands, I was the only one not wearing a suit and tie. I felt horribly out of place. And I could tell my daughter was embarrassed too. I remember my Pastor told me, "Well, you will know better for next time." I thought to myself, "It would've been nice if someone clued me in this time!"

Have you ever showed up overdressed for an occasion? When I first became a Pastor and attended the first All Pastor's Conference, I didn't realize that for one of the evening dinners everyone had dressed up in suits and ties, except for me. That was embarrassing. So, when the next conference came around, the North and East Region Pastor's Conference, I brought my suit and dressed up in a suit and tie for the evening meal. Problem is at the Regional Conference no one dresses up. They only do that for the All-Pastor Conference. Once again, I felt embarrassed, standing out like a sore thumb.

Not standing out is the key. We want to fit in with everyone else. How others are dressed guides us as to how we should be dressed. Then again, it's hard not to be judgmental, at least in our head, about those around us who don't quite fit in with how they are dressed and how they look, especially if it looks like someone had a rough night the night before.

Looking Presentable Spiritually

As Christians we want to look presentable, not only physically, but spiritually. We want to try to do and say what is right. We do this because we want to look good spiritually before others. We come to worship and follow along with the liturgy. We sing the hymns we know, just not too loud because we want to fit in, not stand out. We bow our heads and pray. We join in the Confession and Absolution. But it's inevitable that at some point our minds will wander during worship. We hope no one else notices that. Does God notice?

We might look good before others, but we can't fool God. He sees us 24-7. And He sees not only those things we do that are sinful, that make us unpresentable before Him, but the things we say, and beyond that all those things we think but don't say. That is a convicting thought, isn't it? Part of looking presentable means we inevitably compare ourselves to others. One thing we sometimes do is when we feel too convicted over our sins, or someone else is pointing them out to us, making us uncomfortable, is to deny that we are guilty, that we are unpresentable. Or if we must admit that we have done wrong, we pull out the comparison chart and say, "At least I'm not as bad as those people who do that sin! They are far more unpresentable than I ever am!" But is that really the case?

How many sins does it take to make us unpresentable before our God? Just one. It doesn't matter if you did it, or said it, or thought it. Our God is holy God and He demands that we be perfect just as He is. We might make excuses that our sins aren't as bad as our neighbors, therefore at least we are a little more presentable before God. But being guilty of just one sin, however slight, one angry thought, one slip of the tongue in gossip, and spiritually speaking you are standing filthy before your Lord, as unpresentable before your Holy God as anyone else, even that person you judge to be a "worse sinner."

What can be done? Well, you can confess your sins to your Heavenly Father. In doing so you might see it as something you have accomplished to clean yourself up before God, like the spiritual way of showering, shaving, doing your hair, putting on make-up, putting on the right clothes for the right occasion. But then, before you even leave the house, that inadvertent thought comes to mind about the person who said the wrong thing to you the day before. Or on the way in the car another driver won't let you merge or blows by you and cuts in front of you in annoyance. Or you get to your destination, and your friends start gossiping about those who didn't come, and you can't help but listen. Even with just that one sinful thought, word, or action, you have made yourself spiritually unpresentable again. And if you are honest with yourself, these kinds of things keep happening every day, all day long. If being presentable before God is a work that we must do, then how can we ever be presentable enough to enjoy life with a Holy God now and for eternity?

Jesus: The One Who Stands in Our Place

Think about what it would be like to have someone stand in your place and live your life for you in those difficult moments that you struggle to do what's right? (*Show Progressive Insurance Video Back-Up Order Placer*)

I'm sure you can think of a person in your life who you considered to be a saint, who seemed to handle the problems and struggles in life better than you. Even if you could call upon this person to fill in for you on those things that you just can't seem to get right, there is no other human being that can stand in your place and do it all perfectly without sin; no other human being except One, the One who in our Gospel is standing in the Jordan River.

Matthew 3:14-15 ¹⁴ **John would have prevented him, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?"** ¹⁵ **But Jesus answered him, "Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness." Then he consented.**

Jesus shows up at the Jordan River where John is performing the Baptism of Repentance. Jesus wants to be baptized too. What is John's first reaction? He doesn't want to do it! Why? Because John knows that out of all the people that have shown up to be baptized, or could show up to be baptized, or even those that will refuse to show up and be baptized, this is the One Man out of all of them who doesn't need his baptism. Even John the Baptist needed the baptism of repentance for himself, because he knew that by himself, he is unrepresentable before God. But this man, Jesus from Galilee, this man has no sin. He has no sin that He needs to repent of. He has no thoughts, words, or actions to wash off Himself. He alone is presentable before God.

But Jesus insists that John go ahead with it. And what is the reason why? **"To fulfill all righteousness"** What does Jesus mean by that? It means He came to stand in our place according to the Father's plan of salvation for all mankind, the plan that has been in the works since Adam and Eve fell, to fulfill that plan and bring it to success, Jesus needs to stand in your place.

You and I needed our baptism. You and I needed to have our multitude of sins washed off us. You and I didn't have the power or ability to wash them off ourselves. But the Holy Spirit working through the Word in your baptism did have the power. He washed all your sins away, all of them: past, present, and future. All of them have been washed off you. Now the question is, where did they go? In a spiritual sense they were washed onto that Man who didn't need to be baptized, yet there He is standing in the Jordan River. He was standing there in your place to receive your sin upon Himself.

And what did He do with all of your sins? He stood in your place when He allowed Himself to be beaten and tortured and hung upon the cross. He stood in your place and allowed His blood to flow instead of yours, allowed His body to be broken instead of yours. He stood in your place and took your suffering and death for your sins so that you would never have to.

Spiritually speaking, as Jesus was baptized, was anything washed off of Him? Yes, His good and perfect life. Jesus is God the Son who was incarnate and chose to live our life here on this earth being subjected to the same laws that we are supposed to follow. The only difference is He kept them perfectly. He stood in your place, lived the perfect life you and I never could. And by the power of faith that perfect obedient life was washed on to you.

That is the supernatural effect of your baptism. Your sin is washed onto Jesus and His perfect obedience is washed onto you. Because of this, when the Father looks at you, He doesn't see you as unpresentable, He doesn't see your sin, because it's gone. What does He see? He sees the perfectly obedient life Christ lived for you and gives to you by baptismal faith. Not because of anything you have done or could do, but because your Savior stood in your place, took your filth, and gave you what He earned by standing in your place living your life, His perfect obedience, which is His precious gift of grace and mercy to you in your baptism.

How Do We Remain Presentable?

Well that all sounds wonderful, except I continue to sin daily. What can be done about that? I could look to my confession of my sins as my work, my way of making myself presentable again. But how many times do I actually sin in a day? How many times do you? What about those times when I sin not because of what I've done but what I fail to do? What about those times I sin and don't even realize it, or refuse to realize it?

If I think that I am made presentable before God because of anything I've done or could do, either my attempts to live an obedient life, or because of my Confession of sins, I'm living a lie. It's kind of like how Chat GPT works. Through the power of AI, I can take this picture of me from back when I was skinnier than I am now (*show original picture*) and make myself look like Arnold Schwarzenegger (*Chat GPT picture*). It looks good, but it's not real.

What is it that truly makes me presentable before my Heavenly Father and keeps me presentable? It's the work of the Spirit who gave me faith and keeps me in repentant faith. How can I know that I stand presentable before God? Because the Spirit is at work to show me all those things that declare me to be unpresentable and moves me to confess that by myself, I am a poor miserable sinner who is not worthy of God's love and favor. But He doesn't stop there, He points me to my Savior, who stood in my place, taking all my sin, all my unworthiness, and continues to give me the obedient sinless life He came to stand in my place and live out.

This is the ongoing miraculous work of our baptism as played out through Confession and Absolution. This is our life as Saint and Sinner at the same time. On our own, by our own actions we are totally sinful and unpresentable before God, unworthy of life with Him now or in eternity. But through your faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, you have Him standing in your place for you, continuing to take all the unworthiness the Spirit brings to mind, and even those things He doesn't, taking them to the cross and to the tomb. They are gone! And in their place, you receive Christ's perfect life of obedience He lived for you.

Conclusion

It's good to take pride in yourself and want to look presentable. It is good to try to live a life of obedience to God's Word out of love for Him and to share that love with our fellow man. It's good to examine your thoughts, words and actions to see how you have fallen short and sinned, and confess them before God and one another. But none of these things by themselves make you presentable in a spiritual sense before God. Only your Lord and Savior, who stood in your place, suffering and dying for you, and rising again for you, can declare you to be presentable before God. He declares you to be righteous, to be justified: just as if you never sinned, even though you and I continue to do so. But the same God whose powerful voice made the heavens and the earth, that powerful voice declares you to be what on your own you are not: presentable, a sinless saint, His precious child. He works to keep you in faith, keeps declaring you to be presentable because of that faith and all it brings to you. He continues to do this so that on the Day of Resurrection, when you stand before the Risen Savior, He will make you what you never could be in this life: glorified, completely presentable, sinless in body and soul. And you will live that way for ever and ever. Amen.