

I was once told by a seminary professor that most people really get Jesus name wrong. (We've talked about this before.) He said we call him "Jesus Christ" as if his dad was Joseph Christ and his mom was Mary Christ. No, his proper full name was Jesus of Nazareth, or Jesus Barjoseph, the Hebrew way of saying Jesus, Son of Joseph.

So when we say Jesus Christ we are saying both his name and his role. Christ means, "The Lord's anointed." And there are many christs running around in the Bible. Every king of Israel was called the christ, the Lord's anointed. King David was a christ. King Saul was a christ. Foreigners could be christs too. King Cyrus, the pagan king of Persia is called christ by the prophet Isaiah. Everyone who was seen to be anointed by God for a specific purpose or role was a christ. Or a messiah. Christ is the Greek word for anointed. Messiah is the Hebrew word for anointed.

So today we celebrate the Baptism of Jesus, but perhaps we would be better to call it the Anointing of Jesus. Baptism is not a specifically Christian thing, and what John the Baptist was doing is not an exact parallel to baptism as we understand

it today. Jesus certainly did not need to be baptized for the forgiveness of sins. However, if he is to be the Christ, the Messiah, then somehow, somehow he needs to be anointed. If John the Baptist is the last in the line of prophets from ancient Israel then he is the person to do the anointing.

Exactly what is Jesus anointing however? Is it getting water poured on his head by John? No. The gospels suggest that his anointing is more the coming of the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove after his baptism. So, his anointing, while a human action, is also a divine action.

While Jesus' baptism is not like our own, there are parallels. Why was Jesus anointed? For a purpose, for a mission. And why are we baptized? Among the many reasons is also for a purpose, for a mission. When we are baptized we are called and sent by God to do God's will.

"But what does that look like?" some will ask. Jesus is driven by the Holy Spirit into the wilderness for forty days to be tested and to discern his call. Then he begins his public ministry. What does our call look like? What is our public ministry?

In answering these questions I'm afraid we get it wrong. They seem like good questions, but they're actually one step too soon. Baptism reminds us of this.

Remember, one of the big things about baptism is that it is for the forgiveness of sins. Sometimes we call it a washing away of sins, or the drowning of the old Adam. When we baptize infants we sometimes say it is to free us from Original Sin. But what is "Original Sin"?

That's a good question. We usually cite Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden and them eating the forbidden fruit. While indeed that is the story we want to refer to, it is hard to connect eating a piece of fruit in an ancient story with putting water on your head in a church.

I think we hit pay dirt with this whole concept if we turn to the thoughts of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the 20th Century Lutheran theologian executed by the Nazis. His book on ethics is considered, "the seminal reinterpretation of the role of Christianity in the modern secularized world." That's just a fancy way of saying it's good stuff!

What happens in the story of Adam and Eve? They eat the forbidden fruit in a quest for the knowledge of good and evil. Bonhoeffer suggested that original sin is putting the knowledge of good and evil before knowing about God. Bonhoeffer suggests that Adam and Eve should have focused on knowing God and God's nature better, not seeking something beyond God, something for themselves. His book on ethics begins, "The knowledge of good and evil seems to be the aim of all ethical reflection. The first task of Christian ethics is to invalidate this knowledge... Humans at their origin knew only one thing: God. It is only in the unity of his knowledge of God that he know of other men, of things, and of himself. He knows all things only in God and God in all things. The knowledge of good and evil shows that he is no longer at one with this origin." (Bonhoeffer, Ethics, Pg. 1)

Baptism then is God doing an end run around this brokenness. Baptism is God forgiving us for what seems to be inescapably rooted in our nature - that is, not being content with God and God alone. Not being content to believe that God is all we need. Not being content to believe that God really is as good and loving as God is.

Whenever we ask ourselves what should we do, or what is right and what is wrong, we need to remind ourselves that we've

jumped too far. Perhaps this is all too heady, but we are well to remind ourselves that to even ask what is right and what is wrong, what is good and what is evil, is a part of our sinful brokenness. The knowledge of good and evil and the questions of what is right and what is wrong belong to God, and most properly to God alone. By Bonhoeffer's thinking, only someone broken from God can even conceive of asking what is right?

What is your baptismal calling? What are you anointed to do? These are the wrong questions, too far down the line. Our first task is to seek knowledge of God.

In many ways the New Testament, centered around the revelation of God in Jesus is God revealing to us again his nature. That nature is love.

I'm a big fan of the Harry Potter books because they are about the love of power vs. the power of love. I love the way the forces of evil mock and belittle those who act in love - especially Harry Potter and Albus Dumbledore.

Whole chapters of the Bible are given over to describing God as love and the power of that love. I Corinthians 13 is the

best known. And the entire life of Jesus is about the power of love - a power so great that death can't stop it.

At the crucifixion what does Jesus say, "Father forgive them, for they know not what they do." Is there any word of judgment there? Is there anything about good and evil? No. It is a word of love, fully and perfectly rooted in knowledge of God.

Invariably life is going to force you to make decisions and take actions on what is good and what is evil. There is no escaping it in this broken world. Your first task is not to answer, but to return to God to know him better. Then when you respond you will not be acting on your own judgment of good and evil, you will be acting from the love of God.

Remember, love is not just a sappy sweet feeling. It is a powerful force.

What should you do? What are you anointed to do? First, turn to God and know God's nature fully. Discover God's absurdly lavish love and powerful grace for this world. Discover that God made you beautiful, powerful, capable, and complete; lacking in nothing and needing no enhancements.

Learn, grow, explore and discover in our God. And then, you will know what to do without even asking. Then you will witness to the goodness of God so that others may know that too. Amen