

## **Rock of Ages, Cleft For Me**

**Words:** Augustus M. Toplady; **Music:** James Ward

Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to be baptized by John. But John tried to deter him, saying, “I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?”

Jesus replied, “Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness.”

Then John consented. (Matthew 3:13-15)

“This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.”

**Third Sunday After Epiphany  
Old Orchard Church**

**January 26, 2014 — 10:15-11:50 a.m.**

# Christ Our Brother: Baptized for Repentance Celebrating God's Solidarity With Us

O Love how deep, how broad, how high,  
How passing thought and fantasy,  
That God, the Son of God, should take  
Our mortal form for mortals' sake.

For us baptized, for us he bore  
His holy fast, and hunger'd sore;  
For us temptations sharp he knew;  
For us the tempter overthrew.

All glory to our Lord and God  
For love so deep, so high, so broad;  
The Trinity whom we adore  
For ever and for evermore!

*(Anon. 15th century)*



## Today's Scripture

OT Lesson: Ezekiel 36:22-29a

Gospel Reading: John 1:19-34

## Today's Sermon

"The 3 R's of Grace"

Ephesians 2:8-10

Joseph Bianco, seminary intern, preaching

We celebrate the Lord's Supper weekly—and in a circle, at the end of worship. A word of direction is given, and with this everyone stands and moves to the walls. The cup is passed in two forms: in a chalice and then in small individual cups. You are free to choose.

And as this is the Supper of the Lord Christ, please listen to the instructions we give as to what qualifies a visitor to participate. **But whether you intend to take communion or not, please join us in the circle.**

## Solidarity

I read about a woman who went to a counselor to face problems in her marriage rising chiefly from her disinterest in her husband. Her life was characterized by a certain "deadness of soul." It came out that from the time she was 11 until she was 21 her stepfather had used her as a prostitute bringing in several men every week after school when her (half-knowing) mother was off working.

Being used that way convinced her that she existed only to please others. For months her counselor tried to get her to feel the anger towards her stepfather and her mother that she *should* have felt. But she simply couldn't feel—until the counselor, who had great compassion for her, began to express in front of her the anger *he* genuinely felt toward the mother and stepfather on her behalf. That changed her. When she saw a person in authority defending her, standing so close to her in the abuse she suffered that he made his anger stand in for the anger she was incapable of, she began to feel, because she began to see that she mattered. What an example this counselor was of solidarity!

The word "solidarity" captures the essence of what the high exalted eternal Son did when he became human: he stood alongside us, in solidarity with us. Our joys became his joys, our afflictions, his afflictions. This is so dramatically expressed in Jesus' insistence to John that he must be baptized! He, the pure and perfect One, baptized by a sinner in a ritual signifying that one was morally dirty, in need of spiritual washing—a kind of bath for a soul stained by disregard for God and what God calls good. But John objected.

What did Jesus really mean when he overrode John's protest with the insistence, "**it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteous-ness**"? That this was the Father's will that the sinner should baptize the Sinless One and thus place him who needed no moral washing squarely in the midst of those who do. That is solidarity; and solidarity is love. Jesus came because he loved us. And whoever loves, serves. Jesus came to be our Brother, and like an older brother hero, take the rap we deserved.

All this should move us profoundly, since Jesus' baptism was a high moment in the history of redemption. But it doesn't move us, or not much. Now the opening ceremonies at the Olympics in Sochi in two weeks—that will move us. But spiritual rituals seem artificial and a bit fake. "After all," we assure ourselves, "It's **just** a ritual."

Yet this ritual of a bath for the troubled, repenting soul, a washing off of the heart's grime was given to John the Baptist by God to be something terribly important: a salve for troubled consciences.

So also the baptism Jesus later commanded his disciples to wash us in is a salve. But it has something added to it which makes it *Christian* baptism: it also now signifies the "pouring" of the Spirit of God into the emptiness of our goodness, all on the basis of Christ's finished work at the cross.

Everything your Brother, Christ, won is yours, if you believe. Let that move you.

--Ron Lutjens