* Luke 3:15-17, 21-22
* Thanks for opportunity to be with you again. I so much appreciate being able to be with you today and for the support you’ve shown me over the years
* Begin with a commercial – Bishop Palmer will be in Cincinnati on Tuesday night. Great opportunity to meet him, hear him, up close
* As we look at today’s scripture let’s start with soap and cleansing
* Just how does soap work?
* Now in the case of my grandson, I’m just glad when he chooses to actually put soap on his dirty hands
* For even the strongest soap won’t work when it is NEAR the hands.
* So what is soap?
* Basic formula goes back almost 5,000 years to Babylonians
* Saponification the reaction that occurs when a triglyceride chemically joins forces with a strong alkaline substance
* this creates something called a micelle
* I;ve seen TV commercials for some facial product that speaks of micelles. I found micelles when studying how soap is made and how it works
* Definition of micelle: Particle of colloidal dimensions that exists in equilibrium with the molecules or ions in solution from which it is formed
* resulting product is what we call soap
* soap does 2 things: 1 – decrease surface tension of the water and binds with dirt, oil and bacteria
* soap contains chain of hydrogen, oxygen and carbon atoms.
* One end of each soap molecule is hydrophillac (attracted to water)
  + and other end is lippophillac (attracted to oils)
* lather up, the lippophillac ends attract dirt, oil from a dirty surface
  + then rinsing the hydrophillac ends follow the water, carrying the lippophillac attracted junk with ‘em
* so the lippophillac end attracts the dirt, oils and bacteria. Then dirtied soap (including attracted dirt), can be rinsed because of the hydrophillac attraction
* I type sermon notes
* 3 times, brain said hey hands, type the word rinse
* R-I-N-S-E
* 3 times the fingers typed
* R-I-S-E-N
* Took me a minute to realize what was going on
* Brain didn’t get it
* But fingers did
* Relationship between word RINSE and RISEN
* Same letters, different sequence
* And very much related
* Because he is risen, we can rinse
* Because he is risen, we are rinsed
* So that is how soap works, it both attracts dirt and is easily rinsed and risen away
* Soap
* I know a guy who was once addicted to soap. Fortunately, he is now clean
* Next part of this scripture that caught my eye – River Jordan
* How many bodies of water carry the type of body of water first in the formal name
* Yeah, around here, we have Clearcreek and clearcreek twp, all as one word
* This is exception to what follows
* River Jordan
* But not River Miami, or River Mississipi
* But we do have Lake Erie, but not Lake Caesar Creek
* Maybe it is because we have Great Lakes and a Great River
* But River Jordan is not great in a physical sense
* It is great because of what happened there
* The point at which John did most of his baptizing is about an 8 hour walk from Jerusalem.
* Quite a distance from Galilee
* Jordan River does however, have serious elevation change, from Golan Heights mountains above Sea of Galilee, through Sea of Galilee, then south to Dead Sea, which is below sea level.
* River Jordan becomes meandering as it nears Dead Sea and topography levels out.
* River Jordan is maybe twenty feet wide, no more than 5 feet deep at point at which Jesus was baptized, near Jericho and like I said, about an 8 hour walk from Jerusalem
* Today, the River Jordan is lined with military troops, Israel on the west side and Jordan on the east side
* Sad
* Now speaking to the water level of the River Jordan, the nation Jordan extracts water from the River Jordan for use in agriculture and by the people
* Israel does not, but Israel does extract water from the Sea of Gallilee
* There is a retired pastor in Springboro who while on a pilgrimage to Israel, filled a jug of River Jordan water. Then every time he has done a baptism since, he mixes that with Springboro city water so the baptisee gets a bit of River Jordan water.
* I don’t remember the guy’s name, but he did a baptism here like that
* Anyone remember that?
* Or remember who was baptized like that?
* Anyway, heart of today’s scripture is not about how soap works, or how the River Jordan flows. But about God’s amazing Grace
* United Methodist Discipline says this about baptism:
  + Discipline: we believe the Sacraments, ordained by Christ, are symbols and pledges of the Christian’s profession and of God’s love toward us. They are means of grace by which God works invisibly in us, quickening, strengthening, and confirming our faith in him. Two Sacraments are ordained by Christ our Lord, namely Baptism and the Lord’s Supper.
* Baptism is a dramatic sign of God’s grace and mercy – his willingness to wash us and make us new.  It is an outward sign of God’s forgiveness.
* I read books from varied United Methodist writers including:
* Bishop Kenneth Lee Carder book *Living Our Beliefs – The United Methodist* Way says this about baptism
* Baptism is initiation into the family of God, cleansing from sin, a sign of new birth
* “we believe baptism signifies entrance into the household of faith and is a symbol of repentance and inner cleansing from sin, a representation of the new birth in Christ Jesus and a mark of Christian discipleship
* Baptism is a birthmark
* Baptism is an entrance into Christ’s community, the church: therefore the community shares in the covenant with each baptized person
* Whereas saponification is the technique of creating soap, sanctification is the process that God uses to cleanse us.
  + Yes water is H2O,
  + but through the blessing of the Baptism water, the water molecules symbolically take on new traits:
  + one end of the molecule is attracted to water.
  + The other end, through love of Christ, draws sin.
  + Thus the baptism water molecules surround sin and carry it away
* I have read most of what United Methodist pastor Adam Hamilton has written. In his book *The Way: Walking in the Footsteps of Jesus,* Pastor Hamilton writes*:* 
  + We can speculate about the relationship of Jesus and John.
  + Since Mary knew and was related to Elizabeth, the mother of John, and Elizabeth and Zechariah, with the baby John, lived near Jerusalem, in Elin Karem.
  + Sure seems possible that since their mothers were close and since they were close in age, that Jesus and John knew each other as boys.
  + It could be that Mary and Joseph and Jesus stayed with Elizabeth when they came annually to Jerusalem for Passover. The Passover stay was several days.
  + Seems possible, if not likely that John and Jesus knew each other as boys
  + And continued to know each other as grown men
* Pastor Hamilton also wrote of these thoughts as he stood at River Jordan, at point at which Jesus was baptized:
  + Standing in the river, you can see the water flowing south, knowing that in just a couple miles, it empties into Dead Sea. Nothing lives in the Dead Sea.
  + In Baptism, sins are washed away to the Dead Sea, along with guilt, never to be held against you, no longer having power over you
  + Very very near this spot is where nation Israel crossed over the River Jordan into the promised land, led by Joshua.
    - Baptized Christians, like these sons and daughters of Israel, had to feel a sense of freedom, leaving slavery, either to Egypt or to sin, behind
  + Jesus, having been baptized himself, spoke of the importance of being spiritually reborn, born of water AND the spirit
* John told those around him to “repent, for the kingdom in God is near.” Turn from sin and turn to God.
  + Greek word for repentance metanoia, means literally to change one’s mind
  + Turn from sin, turn to God
  + Greek word for sin harmarita, means to miss the mark or to stray from the path
  + So repent we change our mind to return to the path
  + John preached and baptized for a while, but not more than a couple years
  + Change your mind, Return to the path
* So now Jesus approaches the River Jordan, his cousin recognizes him and Jesus insists on being baptized
* Why? Perhaps he wanted to identify with sinful people? He stepped into the water, not because of his need, but because of ours
* He didn’t announce “I don’t need this”
* Instead he humbly walked into the water for us and WITH us
* Perhaps that moment was the first glimpse of the Trinity
* Think about it, Triune God, three in one
* And here we see each person of the Trinity in action
* The Son came to be baptized
* The Father spoke
* The Holy Spirit descended from the heavens
* Jesus came to be Baptized just as sinful folks were doing
* He did not need to return to the path, but knew that we did and would continue to need
* So he showed us this cleansing
* He showed us that our sins could indeed be washed from us and flow into the Dead Sea.
* We don’t need to be standing in the River Jordan to have our sins washed into the Dead Sea
* As we are forgiven, are sins are gone, and those sins might as well be flowing into the Dead Sea
* But we need to remember that Baptism is a symbol. A mighty symbol, but a symbol. United Methodists do not insist that Baptism is a mandatory happening for admittance into heaven.
* After all, God owns heaven, not us. so our rules are not important or appropriate
* Just like we don’t insist on a style of baptism, immersion or sprinkling
* Or the age of the one being Baptized
  + Infant, child or adult
  + All are wonderful and powerful symbols of God’s redeeming grace offered through faith in Lord Jesus
* Jesus was Baptized
* God spoke at that Baptism, just like our parents can speak at ours
* Our parents make vows regarding us, or we make those vows ourselves, if we are old enough
* Then the congregation makes vows
* Key point of baptism is that it is done in community, not privately
* Others are present and promise to help us along the way
* God spoke very clearly that Jesus was his son!
* Translations vary, but the wording of the three synoptic Gospel accounts are consistent within each translation.
  + You are my son or this is my son
  + I dearly love this son
  + I find happiness in him
* Wouldn’t we all like God to find happiness in each of us?
* We know God loves us, but to hear those words aloud?
  + Special moment
* There is an implied “do what he says!!” in God’s message to us, about Jesus
* Listen to Jesus, live like him
* That brings these questions to mind
  + What would God say aloud if you were baptized today?
  + What do you want God to say?
  + Would God say the words that you want to hear?
  + If the words God would use are not the words you want said,
    - What are going to do about it?
    - You can change that narrative by changing yourself
    - Begin today
* Maybe make that part of the morning prayer – help me to please you today!
* Then maybe someday, most likely in heaven, the Holy Spirit will rest upon us
  + And we can hear that God finds happiness in us
* Remember, we can rinse because He is risen
* Rinse, because he is risen