

"Jesus' Baptism and Our Calling"

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Matthew 3:13-17

The Baptism of Jesus is recorded in Matthew, Mark and Luke. John's Gospel refers to it in chapter 2 when he describes Jesus going out to visit John the Baptist in the wilderness and John sees the Holy Spirit descend upon Christ. So something that gets that much attention in the gospels deserves our attention as well. Two other things to note. First, this is one of those passages in the Bible where you see the Trinity - God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. And second, this event was very important to Jesus personally because of the words from heaven. "This is my beloved Son" is from Psalm 27. "In whom I am well pleased," is a phrase from Isaiah 42. Both passages were wildly understood to be referring to the Messiah. So these words spoken from God the Father would have confirmed in Jesus' mind that he indeed was the Messiah. Let's take a look:

Matthew 3:13-17

Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan, to be baptized by him. John would have prevented him, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?" But Jesus answered him, "Let it be so now; for it is proper for us in this way to fulfill all righteousness." Then he consented. And when Jesus had been baptized, just as he came up from the water, suddenly the heavens were opened to him and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased."

You know, Baptisms are fairly serious events. Even infant baptisms. There's great joy and adorable babies, but just beneath the surface there's something heavy, something serious about it all. In fact, I was thinking this week, I don't have a lot of funny baptism stories. When ministers get together we all have some funny wedding stories to tell. We even have a few funny funeral stories. But seldom a baptism story. I think it's because there's something very significant going on at a baptism. Promises. Commitments. Deep Gratitude. A Celebration of God's Unconditional Love. It's a big deal.

And so it is when it comes to the Baptism of Christ. It was something the early church took very seriously. The Christmas Event - with the shepherds & angels, the wise men and the star - is only in two of the four gospels. The baptism is in all four.

Here's one basic question to start with - *why was Jesus baptized?* You've probably heard this verse regarding John the Baptist (John the Baptizer) - "And John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins." A baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. The New Testament claims that Christ was sinless. So why was he baptized? In addition, up until this time Jews only used baptism for Gentiles converting to Judaism. When a non-Jew wished to become a Jew, he or she would be baptized. They would be washed clean of their sins and their Gentile-ness and become a practicing Jew. Well, Jesus is certainly Jewish. He doesn't need converting. Nor does he need to repent of his sins. So why is he baptized? In my reading this week I came across two answers I liked:

1. *His time had come.* Remember last Sunday, the preacher spoke brilliantly(?) about time? - chronos vs kairos time. *Chronos* is a measure of time - a minute, an hour, a day, a year. *Kairos* is about timing. It's about the right time. It's about God's time. It's listening for the drumbeat of God and dancing to that sacred rhythm. Well, the drumbeat had started, and it was Jesus' time. That's why Jesus began his earliest

ministry with these words, recorded in Mark's Gospel: "The time is fulfilled. The Kingdom of God is at hand" (Mark 1:15). That's kairos time.

Jesus had probably been waiting and wondering about this time for years. Think about it for a minute. The gospels say that Jesus was 30 years old when he began his ministry. His baptism occurs right at the start of his public ministry. So he had been an adult, by First Century standards, for about 15 years. He worked in his father's carpentry business. Joseph appears to have died young, sometime after Jesus was 12 yrs. old (Joseph's in the story of 12 yr. old Jesus lost and then found in the Temple in Jerusalem, but Joseph's never seen again in the gospels). Joseph & Mary had at least 6 children, Jesus being the oldest. So it is likely that he stayed at home after his father died and worked to support the family - his mother and 5 younger siblings. I think that's a beautiful thing to think about - our Savior as a Family Man, providing for his family, helping to raise his younger siblings, especially the 3 boys. But now it's Kairos time. His hour has come. It's time to begin his ministry. To use CS Lewis' phrase, Aslan is on the move! He senses that John the Baptist is doing God's work, calling people back to God, preparing them for the coming of the Messiah, and so it's time for Jesus to assume title, "Christ," "Messiah," and do the work he's born to do.

2. There's one other reason given for Jesus baptism that I like. It this - *he is identifying with the people he came to save*. He is leading the way. The One who would die for their sins is repenting on their behalf. The One who would wash them clean is being cleansed to show them the way. The One who would reconcile them to God was taking the first step for them - submitting to God, being washed clean, surrendering to God.

There's a story about a Brazilian guide taking a tourist through the rain forest. They're in the thick of the jungle and the guide has his machete out clearing the way for them. The tourist is getting a little nervous and calls out to the Guide: "Where's the trail? Where's the path?" The guide shouts back at him: "I am the path." When it comes to God, Christians believe that Christ is the path. He's the guide and He's the

path. He's "the Way, the Truth and the Life," as he said. "Come, follow me," Jesus says. I am the path.

Well, let's see where the Path leads us today when it comes to the Baptism of Christ. What was Jesus trying to teach us through being dunked in the Jordan River that day? I suspect it had something to do with commitment.

Kierkegaard's Fire Chief illustration. Soren Kierkegaard told the story of a small town that had a wonderful Fire Chief. He was a gentleman among gentlemen. "Children loved to visit the firehouse. He always tipped his hat to the women and he could always be counted on for good conversation with the men about town.

But one day there was a fire! The chief rounded up his men and rushed to the burning building. Much to his surprise, the fire chief couldn't get to the building because between him and the building were several hundred townspeople. Each of them was holding a water pistol. And there they were squirting their water pistols at the fire. "Squirt! Squirt! . . . Squirt! Squirt!" The Fire Chief yells, "What are you doing? What do you have water pistols? What are you trying to do here?" A spokesman for the group answers, "We've gathered here to support your efforts, Chief. We all believe in the good work you're doing in this community, and we're here to do our part. We wish it could be more, but what we have to offer, we give freely." "Squirt! Squirt! . . . Squirt! Squirt!"

The Fire Chief then says, "Get out of here, A fire is a place where people risk their lives to put out the fire. It's not a place to just do your little part. It's a place to put your life on the line.

Being a Christian is more than just "squirt, squirt." It's more than just having a little religion. It's more than giving a nod to God. It's more than believing that God is good and Jesus is wonderful. The Messiah knelt in a river one day to teach us that God wants all of us.

A professor of mine told a story of standing on the banks of a river down South, watching the Baptist church in town do baptisms in the river. Someone came up to him and said, "Hey, that's dangerous. Someone could die out there?" My professor replied, "I think that's the idea."

M. Scott Peck (author of *The Road Less Traveled*) tells the story of the day a patient of his called to cancel an appointment. She told him her car was in the shop. Dr. Peck offered to pick her up on his way to work, but he explained to her that he had to make a hospital visit on the way in and she'd have to wait in the car. She agreed. When they got to the hospital, Dr. Peck had another idea. He gave her the names of two of his patients and told her that each would enjoy receiving a visit from her. When they met up again, an hour later, the woman was beaming! She told Peck that visiting those patients had lifted her spirits and she felt better than she had for years. She said she felt "absolutely wonderful!" Dr. Peck responded, "Well, now we know how to get you out of your depression. Now we know the cure for your problem?" The woman answered: "You don't expect me to do that every day, do you?"

Being a Christian is surrendering to God, making a decision every day to live for God.

Jeffrey MacDonald spoke to the local U.C.C. pastors this past week. He's the author of a recent book, *Thieves in the Temple*. He told us about a survey done regarding church members and their views on torture. Here's a summary of the study posted on CNN's web site on April 30th, 2009. It's titled, "Churchgoers more likely to back torture, survey finds."

WASHINGTON (CNN) - The more often Americans go to church, the more likely they are to support the torture of suspected terrorists, according to a new analysis. More than half of people who attend services at least once a week - 54 percent - said the use of torture against suspected terrorists is "often" or "sometimes" justified. Only 42 percent of people who "seldom or never" go to services agreed,

according the analysis released Wednesday by the Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life. White evangelical Protestants were the religious group most likely to say torture is often or sometimes justified - more than 6 in 10 supported it. People unaffiliated with any religious organization were least likely to back it. Only 4 in 10 of them did. (This analysis is based on a Pew Research Center survey of 742 American adults conducted April 14-21, 2009.)

So, if you're ever captured and held prisoner, it's better for you if you're captured by non-churchgoers! Isn't that sad?

We are called to surrender our lives to the will of God and the ways of Jesus. We are called to strive to conform our lives to the image of Christ. Martin Luther said we're called to be "Little Christs" to one another and to the world. We're called to be "Apprentices of Jesus" learning to do what the Rabbi does, learning to think like the Rabbi thinks and feel what the Rabbi feels.

On a lighter note, let me close with this illustration. A mother and her small, young son were walking through a crowded train station one day. It was rush hour and the station was filled with people moving quickly to catch their trains. Someone bumped into the boy and he dropped the bag he was carrying, spilling out all his toys all over the train station floor. Small cars and trucks. Marbles and tops now covered the area. A man in a business came up upon the sight. He put down his briefcase and got down on his hands and knees, helping the little boy pick up his toys. When he finished, the boy looked up at him and said, "Mister, are you Jesus." And he realized that for a brief moment he was.

Think about it.