**November 10, 2019 Matthew 3:1-3, 11, 13-17**

***Why Baptism: For Jesus and For Us***

**Scripture:**

Matthew 3:1-3, 11, 13-17 NRSV (1)In those days John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness of Judea, proclaiming, (2)"Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near." (3)This is the one of whom the prophet Isaiah spoke when he said, "The voice of one crying out in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.'"

…(11)"I baptize you with water for repentance, but one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to carry his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire

…(13)Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan, 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 it is proper for us in this way to fulfill all righteousness." Then he consented. (16)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. (17)And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased."

*“Then the people of Jerusalem and all Judea were going out to him, and all the region along the Jordan, and they were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins.” (Matthew 3:5-6 NRSV)*

*"I am God Almighty. Live in My presence and be devout. I will establish My covenant between Me and you, and I will multiply you greatly" (Genesis 17:1-2).*

*“He who, existing in the form of God, did not consider equality with God as some-thing to be used for His own advantage. Instead He emptied Himself by assuming the form of a slave, taking on the likeness of men. And when He had come as a man in His external form, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death -- even to death on a cross.”* *Philippians 2:6-8*

"*Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe everything I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age." Matthew 28:19-20.*

**Notes:**

1. Why did ***Jesus*** need to be baptized?
   1. The Baptism of Jesus is found in the four ***gospels***.
   2. A reason for Jesus to be ***baptized*** is hard to find.
2. Baptism is what you do once you have found ***Jesus***.
   1. John's ministry was to ***prepare*** the way for the Messiah.
   2. When people ***repented***, he baptized them.
3. Gentiles who wanted to become Jews were called ***proselytes***.
   1. a three-step process: offer a ***sacrifice***; ***circumcision***; and ***baptism***.
   2. In a sense, the ***Gentile*** died and a new person was born when emerged from the water.
   3. John's task was to get God's people to ***turn*** ***back*** to God
4. Why did ***Jesus*** feel it was necessary to baptized?
   1. His was a baptism of ***humility***.
   2. It was an act of ***obedience*** to God.
   3. a baptism of ***commitment***.
   4. a baptism of ***identification***:
5. Jesus took this step of ***obedience*** to show us the way
   1. Being ***baptized*** is about humility, commitment, and identification
   2. What happened when Jesus came out of the water?
   3. Where are you in your ***relationship*** with God.

**Transcript:**

This past week I celebrated a very precious milestone in my life; 29 years ago on Monday November 4th I celebrated the day I asked Jesus into my life. I didn’t celebrate with Cake or Ice Cream. I didn’t have a party; I didn’t even expect cards of congratulations from my friends or family. But I did celebrate in my own heart and mind the grace and blessings given me; How Jesus has extended to me over the years an opportunity to share with you, the privilege to serve here as pastor, and to be a part of your spiritual walk. I have other events in my life that I remember and hold dear. The day I married Jan; we came together on this platform; shared our wedding vows. The day my sons were born. The day I joined this church of the Nazarene; the day I was baptized. And just as each of the baptism candidates have done, I prepared a testimony, and before this congregation shared my heart, my fears, and my passion of serving God.

You likely have memories that are held dear just like me. Yours may not be as sentimental, and they may not be as obvious, but we hold them dear just the same. And for these people who indicated they wanted to take their Christian walk to the next level. Today we gather to watch, to reflect on the day that we made this proclamation, and maybe even recommit ourselves to serve Jesus our Lord and Savior.

We understand the need we have to make this statement. And we read in scripture how John cried out that we should prepare the way for the Lord. That we should repent and ask for forgiveness of our sin; and after we repent and ask forgiveness; we should be baptized. In our passage today we will read how Jesus was baptized and then we ask Why? Why did Jesus need to be baptized? Jesus never sinned, why would he need to make the statement of dying to self in the waters of the Jordan River and to rise again, as a demonstration of his rebirth; Especially when he never had a sin to confess, Nor a sinful lifestyle that he needed to repent and turn away from.

Today I ask you the question and I hope to answer it in a way that is understandable. Why was baptism necessary for Jesus and why is baptism necessary for me? Turn with me to Matthew 3:13-17 and stand with me as we share in our gospel reading.

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The Baptism of Jesus is one of a few events in the life of Christ that made it into all four gospels. While it varies from a brief statement to a detailed account, the fact that it is in all four gospels indicates that it is an important event; and that it is something that we should look at closer and with more curiosity. This event inaugurates Jesus into his public ministry. It is thrusts him into the limelight, towards His eventual death on the cross and resurrection, conquering sin and death.

The story of Jesus baptism is a bit confusing because it is an unusual story. There doesn’t seem to be any reason for Jesus to be baptized, its hard to find. There is some confusion about why a person should be baptized. Some think baptism is the event that officially makes you a Christian. I could ask people if they are Christ followers and get a variety of answers, one being they were baptized at an earlier age. Being baptized when you are young is okay, but scripture doesn’t teach that baptism saves you, in fact I would say that it doesn’t. I would have to say that what saves you is what takes place in your life before baptism.

Some people may think that as you go under the water you miraculously find Jesus. Baptism is not where you find Jesus, it is what you do once you have found Jesus but that doesn’t answer the question why Jesus would seek to be baptized. I think it's important that we realize John didn't just come up with this baptism on his own. It wasn't as if he was preaching one day and said, "Hey, let's go into the water and I'm gonna dunk some of you guys. It'll be fun!" There's a story behind this story . . . sort of like Paul Harvey's "The Rest of the Story."

We have two key players here: Jesus and his cousin, John the Baptist. John's ministry was to prepare the way for the Messiah. His message was simple and straight forward: *"Repent, because the kingdom of heaven has come near!" (Matthew 3:2)*. When people repented, he baptized them. The Jewish people were looking for a deliverer to make things right in their country. They were a people whose land was occupied by an oppressive foreign government, and they longed for freedom. But it was more than that. It was a people whose relationship with God had grown cold.

God had chosen their forefather Abraham to be the patriarch of His people years before. Like many relationships, it started out strong but through the year’s complacency set in. Familiarity breeds contempt, they say. Israel started taking God for granted, and God won't tolerate that for long in relationship with us. A brief history of God's relationship with Israel: God blesses and Israel enjoys, Israel becomes complacent, takes God for granted, and turns her back on Him. God gets Israel's attention through tragedy. The Israelites repent and relationship is restored. And then the cycle begins anew.

John the Baptist comes along during a down cycle of Israel's relationship with God. They had become complacent, taken God for granted and turned their backs on Him, and God had allowed them to experience discomfort in order to get their attention. Honestly, He does that with us sometimes too. And because God had always provided a deliverer in the past, people like Moses and David, there was great anticipating for the next manifestation of deliverer. John, as the preparer of the way, says what has to be said, "Repent, the kingdom of heaven has come near!" It makes perfect sense, doesn't it? The people had to turn their hearts back to God in order to experience deliverance. This occupation by a foreign conqueror is the method God is using to get their attention. And John uniquely adapts a common practice of his day to teach his people about humility, commitment and identification.

Judaism was very popular during the times when God was blessing. Other nations and other people took note; they too wanted their piece of the blessing pie; so, occasionally, Gentiles petitioned to become Jews. It's just human nature - most of us want to identify with a winner. Like when a sports team does really well, how many people start wearing their gear. The Gentiles who wanted to become Jews were called proselytes; which means convert. So, a proselyte is a Gentile becoming a Jew.

For a Gentile to become a full-fledged Jew (and any Gentile could do this) there was a three-step process that had to be completed. The first was to offer a sacrifice. A heifer or pair of turtledoves was brought and given as a burnt offering to God. There was an expense involved and the lifeblood of the animal was spilled.

The next was circumcision, the cutting away of a piece of flesh from a man's body. For a Jewish boy, it was done when he was 8 days old, the pain wasn't remembered. But adult male, Jewish proselyte, had to undergo the procedure, regardless of age. This would prevent one from jumping into this without a great deal of consideration. Men didn't "impulse buy" Judaism. I would suspect this element of the process left more than a few men out the cost was a bit too much. Circumcision was unique to the Jewish people. It was their distinguishing, permanent, irreversible, identifying mark on their body designating them the only people who were in covenant relationship with God.

After the circumcision healed, the proselyte went through the final step of baptism. The person stripped off all of his clothes. (We don't do that here by the way.) He then went into the water naked, and fully immersed his entire body, being careful that not one bit of flesh remained dry. Can you imagine the level of humility that would take? Becoming a Jew was something one did with exceptional contemplation.

Once this process had been completed, the proselyte was now considered a Jew in every way. He had fully renounced his previous life, his previous nationality, previous allegiances; he or she was fully Jewish physically and spiritually. His identity completely changed. This wasn't just an "add on" to your life. You didn't add Jewishness to your old identity. God didn't become just another among many gods in your life. In a sense, the Gentile died when he went under the water and a new person with a new name emerged, and a new identity was born when he or she came out of the water. John adopts this proselyte's baptism and morphs it into a baptism of repentance. *“Then the people of Jerusalem and all Judea were going out to him, and all the region along the Jordan, and they were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins.” (Matthew 3:5-6 NRSV)*

Remember now these are Jews. John's task wasn't to get people into Judaism; it was to get God's people to realize their sin and turn back to God to turn from self-centeredness to God-centeredness. This baptism was a moment of humility, commitment and identification; it was the time a person could look to and say, "That's when I did it; I made my commitment public that day." We have those sorts of ceremonies today. Ceremonies which mark the transition from one stage in life to another: graduation is kind of a stepping into adulthood event in the lives of young people. A wedding ceremony is a public declaration that some-thing in your life has changed; and Baptism.

We come back to the question; **why did Jesus feel it was necessary to baptized**? ***Jesus’ baptism was a baptism of humility***. If you'll recall, amidst the protests of John the Baptist, Jesus explains why He has come for baptism. Matthew 3:15, Jesus answered him, *"Allow it for now, because this is the way for us to fulfill all righteousness."* Then he allowed Him [to be baptized]. Jesus humbles Himself to do what God asks.

***Jesus’ baptism was an act of obedience to God***. Jesus does this because God requires it. He lived a life of complete obedience to God that's why we can say about Jesus, and no other person who ever lived, that He was sinless. I can't say that, and you can't say that; only Jesus can. Obedience to God is all God' has ever asked for. God had a conversation with Abraham where He said, *"I am God Almighty. Live in My presence and be devout. I will establish My covenant between Me and you, and I will multiply you greatly"* *(Genesis 17:1-2)*. Remember Israel got in trouble when they, "became complacent, took God for granted and turned their backs on Him?" Baptism was another in a series of acts of humility and obedience on the part of Jesus. It began with his coming to earth as a helpless infant baby boy; it ended with His crucifixion, and in between Jesus obeyed His Father. We find in Philippians 2:6-8. Speaking of Jesus, it says, *“He who, existing in the form of God, did not consider equality with God as some-thing to be used for His own advantage. Instead He emptied Himself by assuming the form of a slave, taking on the likeness of men. And when He had come as a man in His external form, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death -- even to death on a cross.”* *Philippians 2:6-8*

***Jesus’ baptism was* also a *baptism of commitment***. This launched Jesus' ministry that would eventually lead to the cross. He knew where this thing was headed. For three and a half years, Jesus did His thing and it ended with crucifixion. His baptism was a commitment to God's plan and you and me.

**Finally, *Jesus’ baptism was a baptism of identification***: he affirmed John's ministry and identity with the people He'd come to save. Remember when Jesus came out of the water; the Spirit descended upon him like a dove and we heard, "This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased."

Jesus took this step of obedience to show us the way, to identify with those of us who do need to repent and turn back. To demonstrate how we should be Humility, commitment, and identification: that's really what baptism is all about.

But what does that mean for me and you? I hate advertisements on the television, but I can’t help but watch. Especially when there is one that has a funny line or a creative way to poke humor at our quirky lifestyles. During the Super Bowl there seems to be a competition for the best ones. I won't miss the commercials and go to the restroom or get snacks during the game. I don't want to leave the room while the commercials are on. However, with all this advertising; estimates are we may view as many as 3,000 in a day, we've naturally developed a consumer’s mentality. Our attitude becomes, "What can this do for me?" Even about spiritual things. What can church do for me? What can Jesus do for me?

I have read that there are approximately 450,000 words in the English language, Yet about 80 percent of our conversations uses only 400 words. It probably is no surprise that the most common words in the English language are... "I," "Me," "My," and "Mine." There's little question this is the "Me" generation.

But there's so much more to following Jesus! There are incredible benefits to following Jesus: unreserved acceptance, limitless love, God's unmerited favor - grace, forgiveness for all our sins, and purpose in life. Those are powerful benefits to following the Lord. It pays to follow Christ. But following Christ is more than benefits; it also entails responsibility. The "more" of Christianity has to do with humility, commitment, and identification. The proselyte's baptism was about humility, commitment and identification. Jesus' baptism was about humility, commitment and identification. For you being baptized today, its about humility, commitment, and identification.

The baptisms we perform today are about humility, commitment and identification. It's humbling to get into the water in front of everybody. It's an act of humble obedience to Jesus. He once said, "*Go, there-fore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe everything I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age." Matthew 28:19-20.* It's also an act of commitment and identification. When you're baptized and people see you, the expectation level goes way up. People will expect you to walk the talk a little differently. You're identified with Christ, and just like He was baptized to identify with us, we're baptized to identify with Him. He was buried and rose again, and guess what? We get buried under the water and we rise again unless you slip or somebody pays me to keep you under a while, but that doesn't usually happen because it really messes up the identification piece.

Remember what happened when Jesus came out of 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."* *Matthew 3:16-17 NRSV*

Today as we celebrate this day with those who wish to be baptized; Consider this; where are you in your relationship with God., consider if you have not done so already, taking the next step of baptism. And If you have already been baptized; Today I ask you to remember, the day that you died to self and asked Jesus to be Lord of your life, the day that you demonstrated your humility, commitment and identification; when you demonstrated the outward sign of inward grace.