

Sermon: January 12, 2019

Let us pray, Lord, we have gathered together today to be inspired by your Word. To join together in thankfulness of your grace and compassion in our lives. WE come together as a family of faith, to encourage and be encouraged in our fellowship together. We offer you our hymns and prayers and I now offer you the words of my mouth and the meditations of all of our hearts and may they be acceptable unto you our redeemer. Amen.

Our reading today from Matthew, which describes Jesus' Baptism in the river Jordan, is an incredibly important text for the church. We know it to be important because in one form or another it is described in all four of the Gospels. To put that into the context for you today, the birth narrative of Jesus, a narrative that we all would likely name as one of the most important passages for our faith, a narrative that for some is the only scripture reading they hear all year long, is found in only two of the Gospels, but Jesus baptism is referenced in all four. Matthew, Mark and Luke all share a similar pattern that we heard today. John's Gospel does not include the baptism in a straight forward manner, but does reference it when the Gospel describes John explain who Jesus is.

Its referenced in all four Gospels because it is what is known as a pinnacle moment in the life of Jesus. Sure, we know that when he was born that Angels sang wondrous songs and stirred the shepherds of Bethlehem to move away from the fields to come a worship in a stable. WE know that the magi from the east travelled a great distance to bring him gifts that symbolized what his life would be, but this moment described for us today, is more important then all of that. Because it described Jesus not just hearing the call of God in his life, but responding to it.

Jesus baptism is the fulfilment of all of the work of John the Baptist, who channeled the prophets of old, when he proclaimed for all to hear, “make straight in the desert a highway for our God” and more personally, “I come to baptize you with water, but one will come who will baptize you with the holy Spirit.” That one was Jesus and that time had come. Often when I speak to folks about Baptism, I describe for them that Baptism is not so much God’s yes to us, but rather it is our yes to God. Meaning that God loves us unconditionally already, baptized or not, God knows us and cares for us; we are not “saved” or known only to God once baptism has occurred; God loves us and knows completely no matter what.

Baptism then is to say yes to that freely given love, to say yes “I recognize the importance of God’s light and love in my life and I want to not only acknowledge it, but participate in a tradition that shows that I am ready and want to live into that love everyday. Based on that understanding then, Jesus Baptism is so incredibly important because it is this moment, where Jesus shifts from simply being one who has a really cool story about the day he was born, into something so much more; this passage literally is the moment, with or without words, that Jesus says yes to the path that God has placed before him. In the church today we would say that this is the moment when Jesus accepts his call from God.

But there is also something so incredibly odd about this event. If it is so important to the life and ministry of Jesus, if this is a pinnacle moment when Jesus choose to accept the call issued by God, why does it not seem to be that big of a deal to God? Why is this day not celebrated as high Holy Day in the church, like Christmas or Easter? Why does it seem to almost be passed over as if its not really anything special at all? If polled, I am guessing that we as a congregation would place this Sunday as less important then even most of the Sundays that we have made special ourselves, like the picnic Sunday (or even pancake Sunday) Think about it, when Jesus is born Angels sing and blow trumpets, people travel huge distances to meet him, Shepherds leave their fields, something they would

likely never do, all to meet a baby. When Jesus dies, God responds in one Gospel by ripping the curtain in the temple in two; there are rumours of earthquakes and even more importantly God responds by opening the tomb and raising Jesus from the dead. But in this pinnacle moment in his life and ministry, as Jesus comes up out of the water, Matthew's text states, that he and he alone sees the dove and the heavens open, and that he for sure, but maybe others as well, hear the words, "This is my son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased." No Angles, nor trumpets, no earth quakes, no travelling Magi, or wondrous miracles just he words, "I am well pleased.

Now for sure God speaking clearly would draw my attention, but it's the choice of words that are intriguing. The words "I am well pleased," do not feel or sound like great celebration words. In fact, looking at the Greek wording used in this section of the Gospel, God is described as being *content*, that Jesus has entered onto this path. Content that Jesus has said yes. Content that the journey that would lead to us gathered here today would begin. Content....we expect more don't we? Think about any major moment in your life, maybe a graduation, a significant birthday, wedding day, the birth of your child, even a funeral for a loved one or maybe just a big celebration day like New years eve can you imagine

the count down at a new years eve party sounding like this, “5-4-3-2-1...I am content that the new year has begun.” It’s not the same is it?

We tend to celebrate, maybe even over celebrate big moments in our lives or times in history. We are filled with joy and exuberance; we are not simply content. As one scholar notes, “Our world demonstrates that excess is a sign of success.” Meaning that excessive celebration points to the significance that that celebration has. When you turn 99 you don’t have a huge party, but when you turn 100, that’s a big deal. And so when it comes to celebrations the more joy filled or the more amazing ways we celebrate, points out to others how great and good the event must be.

Maybe one of the best examples of this is sports. As you know I am a huge NFL football fan and we are currently in the midst of the NFL playoffs, but in 2010 during a playoff game between the New Orleans Saints and the home town Seattle Seahawks something incredible happened. It’s known as Beast Quake. Beast Quake is the name that refers to a play that occurred in the fourth quarter when Seattle running back Marshawn Lynch (nick-named beast mode) broke nine open filed tackles in route to what would become a 67 yard touchdown. IT really was an incredible play to watch The fans in that stadium, which already is

considered to be one of the loudest stadiums in the NFL, celebrated so loudly with stomping and clapping and cheering, that their celebration registered on a nearby seismograph and actually, according to Richter scale, was considered small-scale earthquake. That was for a touchdown in a football game.

So, God's reaction of simply being content to this incredibly important moment seems so underwhelming. We would think that angels and trumpets would be used at this moment. But no, God it seems is simply content that Jesus has begun his world changing ministry; it is rather anticlimactic. But at the same time, I cannot help but offer that that is actually how God normally works.

Looking at our passage today, Jesus has come to the river Jordan and has decided to be baptized by John. Not to be baptized in the Christian faith, but instead to be renewed, to be made clean, to be made ready for what lies ahead. In so doing Jesus begins what will end up being three years of work. Three years of teaching about who God really is. Three years of acting out the ways that we can experience God in the world. Three years of seeking justice. Three years of modeling love and hope and peace in profound and tangible ways. Within those three years, there are times that Jesus acted in ways that were awe inspiring, raising lazaurus from the grave, feeding the 5000; but more often than not the way God is expressed through the life and work of Jesus is found in subtle

gestures of grace; a healing hand placed on one who has not been touched for years, a kind word to one who has spent most of their life going unnoticed. More often than not God is experienced in personal ways, that for the most part, are unnoticed by the people around them.

What this points to for me is not to say that God cannot and will not act in grand ways in our lives or in the world, but more so is to suggest that God remaining content in a major moment Jesus's life and ministry, is a lesson that we all need to fully understand for our lives. The lesson is around, what it means to say yes to God and how God responds to our care and our love. Living a faithful life, means to live a life of challenge. For we are challenged to see the good always, to care for others, to lift up the broken, to stand against all manner of isms, to ensure that the ways we are living, leave this world better than we found it.

We should not need to be praised with trumpet and angelic choirs when we act upon the ways of God. When we, who have said yes to God's love in our lives, seek justice, seek goodness, act with warmth and grace for the betterment of humanity, we should not need a parade. We should not expect fireworks every time we seek to care for our planet, to care for this world which we are part of

and stewards of. We should not need fanfare or the celebration to be so loud that it causes an earthquake, every time we love our neighbour. Instead we should do these things because we believe them to have incredible significance in our lives and because we believe them to be the actions and words that we are called to model by God, and which makes a significant difference in the lives of others.

Instead, when we act in these ways God is well pleased, content, for in acting these ways we have built relationships with others that matter. In acting these ways we have brought joy into the world and created hope. In acting in these ways we have developed and lived in peace. There is no celebration big enough, or loud enough, or meaningful enough to show the goodness of what occurs when we live faithfully. And in fact a celebration of someone for caring for another seems odd; instead as our scripture points out, when we respond to the world in love, God is content; which implies blessings and grace, for in acting in the ways that God invites us to act, like Jesus asks of us, brings about the Kingdom of God in the now.

Celebrations of all sorts are good and wonderful and exciting. WE should celebrate and find ways and reasons to celebrate. But we should appreciate deeply, that Gods contentment in Jesus baptism, Jesus yes to God's call in his life,

can and is the same contentment that comes to God when we respond in our lives in the ways that Jesus taught; for in that content moment, God is proud that Jesus, and we have followed by living in and for justice, kindness and love. IT may not be as exciting as an angelic chorus, but to know that when we act and speak in response to God's grace and love, that God is proud of us, well that my friends is something more meaningful than any celebration can offer; for it means that we have built relationships and cared enough about our call from God, to respond in kind. And thank be to God for that. Amen.