

Sermon for January 8, 2017
Matthew 3:13-17

Can you feel it? Can you feel the discomfort of John as Jesus asks John to baptize him? All of the Gospel writers have a problem with John baptizing Jesus, but it's probably the most palpable in Matthew's recording of it. Matthew deals with it by adding two items to the tradition he inherits from Mark. First, he has John protest the request from Jesus. "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?" You can hear how incredulous John, and Matthew, feels about the request.

Secondly Jesus acknowledges the awkwardness of the situation and gives John an out by saying that it's a temporary situation and that by doing it they fulfill all righteousness. But while this solves the initial problem of Jesus' baptism by John, Christians ever since have struggled with the question: Why is Jesus baptized at all? Since we typically connect baptism with the forgiveness of sin and if Jesus was the sinless Son of God, in what way does he need baptism? What benefit does Jesus get from baptism?

One point that all of the Gospel writers agree on is the fact that baptism is not simply a mechanism for forgiveness, but rather it announces God's favor and establishes Jesus' identity. In Matthew's account the voice from heaven announces to everyone that Jesus is God's Son, the one with whom God is well pleased. Baptism for Jesus was less about forgiveness than it was about commissioning; it was the inauguration of his mission and ministry and assurance of God's presence.

So while we've addressed these two problems, there remains a third: What does Baptism mean to us or to put it another way, why does Baptism mean so little to us? This may sound a bit harsh, because most of us still make something of a big deal of their child's baptism. But while the day itself may be a big deal for some, our emphasis on baptism seems to end there. Few parents remind their children of their baptism or celebrate the anniversary of their baptism with anything similar to the attention we lavish on birthdays—and if you are a parent who does; I

applaud you! Most families don't have a sense of what baptism means or why it matters. Which is why stories like this one are so important—they give us an opportunity to discuss the meaning of Baptism.

So how can Jesus' baptism teach us about our own? Like Jesus, our identity is established in God's good and gracious acceptance and affirmation of us that comes from Baptism. Sometimes when we focus only on baptism as washing away sin, we've missed the profound words of empowering grace that are spoken here to Jesus and also to us. For we, too, are God's beloved sons and daughters, those with whom God is well pleased.

This message has never been more timely; especially after the commercials that are on during the Christmas season. For we live in a culture that promises acceptance only if we are skinny enough, or rich enough, or strong enough, or popular enough, or beautiful enough, or you fill in the blank. Which makes the message of baptism so important for us to hear—that God has declared that we are enough, that God accepts us just as we are, and that God desires to do wonderful things for and through us.

So, on this day let us give affirmation of our baptisms. You have made public profession of your faith. Do you intend to continue in the covenant God made with you in holy baptism: to live among God's faithful people, to hear the word of God and share in the Lord's supper, to proclaim the good news of God in Christ through word and deed, to serve all people, following the example of Jesus, and to strive for justice and peace in all the earth? If so, answer **I do, and I ask God to help and guide me.**

People of God, do you promise to support and pray for one another in your life in Christ? If so answer **We do, and we ask God to help and guide us.**

Let us pray. We give you thanks, O God, that through water and the Holy Spirit you give us new birth, cleanse us from sin, and raise us to eternal life. Stir up in your people the gift of your Holy Spirit: the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of

knowledge and the fear of the Lord, the spirit of joy in your presence, both now and forever.

Amen.

As you leave today remember that you are a child of God, deserving of love and respect, and God will work through you to change the world.