

St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church

The Baptism of Jesus

Through baptism we receive Jesus' righteousness and God's blessing.

Scripture: Matthew 3:1-17

Rev. Steve Filyk

Opening Hymn: Come Thou Fount Of Every Blessing (Nettleton)

Choruses: Blessed be your name & The River

Communion Hymn: This I believe (The Creed) or Behold the Lamb

Closing Hymn: Be Thou my vision [461]

Communion

January 8, 2023

Most of us are aware of the term 'self-talk'.

It's that voice in your head that say's

"you've got this" when you peering down

A steep run called "body bag".

It's that voice in your head that say's

"I'm not good at this" when you're attempting

to join that zoom meeting

for the third time.

Most of us are aware of the term 'self-talk'.

Some of us deliberately try to shape it

By mocking the harsh criticism

we sometimes throw at ourselves,

Or by adopting positive mantras

Especially when we are attempting something new.

But apart from your own inner voice,

That supportive coach,

Or caustic critic,

Do you ever discern the voice of God?

And when God speaks,

Do you hear words of warning

Or words of blessing?

PAUSE

Today we are continuing our New Year's journey

Through the Gospel of Matthew.

Last week we looked at a genealogy

That authenticated Jesus' credentials to be the Messiah:

He is a son of David and child of Abraham.

Of all the Gospels, Matthew emphasises the fulfillment of Scripture,
 Both through allusions to Biblical texts as well as specific “fulfillment formulas”
 which include “quotations from the Old Testament
 demonstrating Jesus’ fulfillment of prophecy.”

One scholar notes that, “For Matthew,
 the fulfillment of Scripture is less about apologetics
 and more about God’s sovereign purposes
 [about demonstrating how] all of human history
 is heading toward its goal and culmination in Christ.ⁱ

Last week we looked at Jesus genealogy in Matthew chapter 1.

In the second chapter of Matthew, we are told about Jesus’ birth,
 The arrival of the Magi, the Holy Family’s flight from Herod,
 And their later return.

But between Matthew chapter two and today’s reading,
 The story fast-forwards a few decades.

“The story skips from Jesus as an infant
 to Jesus as a thirty-year-old,
 and we don’t have a clue as to what happened in between.

One day Jesus puts down his hammer,
 takes off his tool belt,
 hangs a “Closed” sign on the door of the carpenter’s shop,
 and [decides it is time to pursue another calling].

Jesus heads south and finds his cousin John,
 standing in the muddy Jordan in his camel-hair baptismal robe,
 smelling of locusts and honey.
 Jesus gets in line and waits his turn.”ⁱⁱ

People are almost universally convinced that John is a prophet,
 That is a spokesperson for God.
 But the sermons John was preaching weren’t the type
 That most of would consider good news.

John’s warning the people that God’s judgement is speeding towards them.
 He’s cautioning them not to rely on their religious heritage,
 But start putting their faith into practise by living honestly
 And generously [I’m filling in his sermon with some of the content
 Found in Luke chapter 3].

John is calling them to repent and be baptised.

Now you should know that baptism wasn’t a practise for

Those who were born into the family of Abraham.
 It was only used for outsiders, who wanted to join the faith.

“Proselyte baptism was [used] for purification
 and to mark a change in status...

[All to say that] By requiring baptism...
 “John was treating his fellow Jews
 as if they were spiritually gentiles.”ⁱⁱⁱ

They were so far gone, so lost, so wayward,
 It is as if they had to come into the family again.

This is the voice of God, through John,
 that we hear at the outset of Matthew.
 It is a voice of discipline and warning.

But that is not the only voice of God that we hear in this story.
 We are told that along with many others,
 Jesus came forward to be baptised.

This creates a conundrum for John.
 He had insight to know before him
 was someone special, someone holy and righteous.
 Jesus’ presence made John feel like he needed to be washed
 To be baptised instead.

But when Jesus told John that it was needed
 “to fulfill all righteousness” John consents.

Matthew tells us that “The moment Jesus came up out of the baptismal waters,
 the skies opened up and he saw God’s Spirit—it looked like a dove—
 descending and landing on him.

And along with the Spirit, a voice:
 “This is my Son, chosen and marked by my love,
 delight of my life.”^{iv}

In today’s passage God speaks words of warning through John,
 And then words of blessing and affirmation from the heavens.

So why these two very different words?

Paying attention to the context,
 That first word of warning,
 “it’s time to shape up”,
 is meant for the faithless,
 For the lukewarm masses.

The second word of blessing,
 is meant for a uniquely faithful one,
 The wholeheartedly devoted Jesus.

For Jesus who will spend the next three years
 Pursuing God's will over his own,
 To the point of his own death on a cross.

When you think of your own life,
 Do you hear God's voice uttering words of warning or blessing.
 When you look at your track-record of faithfulness and faithlessness,
 Do you hear God berating you as a stranger
 or blessing you as a precious child.

It is interesting that John didn't seem very convinced
 That his preaching would be successful in changing human hearts.

What did he say to the religious leaders who showed up
 At his revival meeting?

"Brood of snakes!
 What do you think you're doing
 slithering down here to the river?"^v

John it seems, has been working the preaching circuit long enough
 To know that the human heart is innately God-resistant.

Even though people might come forward in baptism...
 Well sometimes it's just like our New Year's resolutions,
 The resolve often only lasts for a few weeks.

I'm reading U2 frontman Bono's biography
 And he says something to the effect,
 That rings true in my own life:

"When I was young I thought I couldn't change the world
 But could change the world in me...
 when I grew older I realised
 I couldn't change the world in me."

Real hope for any refinement would depend on something else
 Someone else, some more powerful,
 Someone who could baptise not just with water,
 But with the Spirit.

Real hope would depend on Jesus.

When Jesus approaches John for baptism
 he tells John it is to “fulfill all righteousness”.

Jesus himself is the fulfillment of all righteousness,
 He is the source “of the grace which gives [stubborn] sinners
 who have no standing before God
 a place to stand in a new relationship to God”^{vi}

He makes creatures of God, children of God.

Because of Jesus, when we are baptised,
 We are clothed with Christ’s righteousness.
 And God’s voice to us is no longer the judgement of John,
 But the welcome of a precious child.

I like how the Apostle Paul puts it in his letter to the church at Rome:
 “Therefore, there is now no condemnation
 for those who are in Christ Jesus,
 because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit
 who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death.”^{vii}

Sure we may still convince ourselves that we are under judgment.
 We may doubt that this is only negative self-talk,
 We may wonder if this is the voice of God.

“One person who knew doubting quite well,
 who struggled with doubt his whole life,
 was that famous reformer, Martin Luther.

Over the course of his life,
 Martin Luther suffered great bouts of anxiety and depression.
 He would have crises of faith so severe
 that he doubted his own salvation.

At times he became so frightened
 he had visions of Satan standing before him,
 ready to usher him through the gates of hell.

So, Luther placed a large plaque in his room that said: “Remember your baptism.”
 Luther understood that the fact of his baptism
 was much stronger than any doubt or anxiety he might produce.”^{viii}

It is stronger because it is a gracious gift of God. Amen.

ⁱ "The Unique Purpose of Matthew: Jesus Is the Promised Messiah | BibleProject™." BibleProject, 4 Jan. 2023, bibleproject.com/blog/gospel-of-matthew.

ⁱⁱ "The first step." 5 Jan. 2023, www.ministrymatters.com/all/entry/4537/the-first-step.

ⁱⁱⁱ Reeves, Rodney. Matthew: 1 (The Story of God Bible Commentary) (p. 70-71). Zondervan Academic. Kindle Edition.

^{iv} Matthew 3:16-17 MSG

^v Matthew 3:7 MSG

^{vi} F. Dean Lueking "Matthew 3:13-17" *The Lectionary Commentary: the Gospels* 16

^{vii} Romans 8:1 NIV

^{viii} . "Remember Your Baptism! - Noe Valley Ministry." Noe Valley Ministry, 11 Jan. 2016,
www.noevalleyministry.org/2016/01/remember-your-baptism.