

JESUS AND WATER: SURVIVING THE SUMMER HEAT

Jesus at the River

Matthew 3:13-17

We begin our *Jesus and Water: Surviving the Summer Heat* series with Jesus' baptism. His baptism is the first recorded account of Jesus as an adult. What must have been going on in his life up until now? How many times has his mother told him the story of his birth? What must it have been like for him to sit in the synagogue listening to and embracing the history of his people and their special relationship with God? What is it that has moved him on this day at the age of thirty to be baptized by an itinerant preacher that by all accounts most people think is a little off?

Can you hear John after Jesus requests baptism? "*What do you mean you want me to baptize you? Shouldn't it be the other way around? You baptizing me?*" Friends, we really should not be surprised. From the very beginning of his ministry Jesus did the unexpected. It seems he confused people a lot because he had difficulty with the 'shoulds' of life and religion. "*Jesus you should baptize me!*" Just as an aside I will remind you that we have no accounts that Jesus ever baptized anyone.

After John tells Jesus what he should be doing, Jesus says, "*John, I need for you to baptize me right now. It is through my baptism that we are demonstrating what is just and honorable.*" Even though theologians and pastors struggle with what Jesus means by these words it appears that John understands them because he immediately agrees to baptize Jesus.

John offered a baptism of repentance. Baptism was a sign, a symbol, of one's turning from sin to God. It was a sign of reconciliation with God. It was an indication that one acknowledged the presence and the power of God in their life. It was saying, "*I am giving up that which leads me away from a meaningful and fulfilling life with God.*"

Baptism was a sign of commitment to God.

Jesus' baptism is a sign of identification with his brothers and sisters—you and me. He is identifying with our pain and our shame. Jesus uses his baptism as an opportunity to publicly accept his mission as the one who reconciles the divine and the human—God and people. Jesus baptism is about identification and reconciliation.

What a gift it is when someone so cares about you that they take the time to walk in your steps, to get to know you as best as they can, to learn what it must be like to be you. And it is important to know that they are doing this not to trip you up or to use it against you but to identify with you. And they do such a good job of identifying that when you cry they cry, that when you rejoice they rejoice, that when you feel shame they feel shame. My friends this is what Jesus did. Jesus' baptism is a sign of his identifying with us.

Jesus as an identifier takes on even more significance when we consider that he was in special relationship with God. That in some mysterious way he represented God. Identifying is a great thing but Jesus did more than identify with us he also came to bring reconciliation with God. He came to be a bridge to God. His message to us is—I know what it is like to be

you and it does not scare me off. Your tears, your sin, your shame, your aloofness—none of it scares me off. It does not scare me off because I know you to be a people of worth and value. And I have a teaching and a life that can help you to be in touch with your worth and value and that also can reconcile you with God. Jesus' baptism is a sign of his reconciling us with God.

Friends, figuratively speaking, it was on the day of his Baptism that Jesus picked up his cross. It was on this day that he committed his life to God and to us. So often we hear the importance of the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus. But I submit to you my friends that his death, burial and resurrection only take on meaning because of his life. He came not to tell about God's love but to live God's love. He came not to tell us to love each other rather he came to show us how to love each other. He came not to talk about God but to present God. Jesus did these things by being one of us. It was at his baptism that Jesus publicly accepted his life's mission.

Jesus was an example to us of the importance of accepting our life mission. Why at age thirty? He was not ready before. Why did he not accept and be about his mission at the age of twelve when it is recorded that he was questioning the teachers in the temple? He was not mature enough. Jesus needed time to experience life and to truly consider what it was that God was calling him to do. Jesus needed time to process his thoughts and his beliefs. He needed time to prepare himself. And then even after his public commitment—his baptism—it is recorded that he spent another forty days in spiritual contemplation and prayer.

What a difference Jesus made. He carefully spent time determining his life's mission. He then went public with that mission. And he was determined even in the face of opposition and certain death that he would fulfill God's will for his life. Yes! I do believe that it was on the day of his Baptism that Jesus picked up his cross and began his walk to Calvary. This was a walk that he willingly undertook because he was committed to identifying with us and reconciling us with God. And it was when he accepted his mission that the heavens opened and Jesus heard the voice of God, "*This is my beloved Child in whom I am well pleased.*"

Friends, Jesus had his mission and so do we have our mission. We too have a responsibility to commit our lives to God and to service. And like Jesus we need to prepare ourselves for whatever our mission is. And then when we know what it is we need to commit ourselves to it. Jesus picked up his cross, his mission, on the day of his baptism and he carried it until the end of his life. Jesus once said to his disciples, "...*take up your cross, your mission, and follow me.*" (Matthew 16:24) When we do that, we too can experience the heavens opening and the voice of God blessing us with these words, "*You are my beloved child in whom I am well pleased.*"