**1/8/23**

**Set That Example**

**Matthew 3:13-17**

I think it is fair enough to assume that all of you have worked jobs in your lifetime… Right?

I would venture that every one of you has had some sort of leadership role, be it big or small, at some point too… Correct?

I would also be led to believe that no matter what field you were working in, or what task you were completing, you were always doing it to the best of your ability… Is that Accurate?

You may wonder where exactly I might be going with all these questions today. I mean after all; it is kind of an awkward way to start out a Sermon isn’t it? Well, I have come to realize more and more over time that it is not just my job to stand up here and read to you, or preach at you. I feel that it is my responsibility, and more so my calling, to educate you and make you think outside of the box a little bit as well.

Now, I do my best every day whether I am at my job at AtlantiCare Behavioral Health or with all of you here at Holy Spirit Lutheran Church. I would not expect you or anyone else to do what I will not do. I would not lead without teaching and setting that example. I for sure do not get caught up on a position or title, and say that is not my job or not my responsibility. It is here, and yes even at work, that I am forever reminded that the entire point of coming together as a community is to strengthen one another, and build each other up. We get that in today’s Gospel Reading, as well as several other key points that we try to picture or understand.

Sure, there a few moving parts in our Gospel Reading today, but it is surprisingly pretty straight forward if you think about it. Unfortunately, our minds can play tricks on us at times. Now, that may be Satan sticking his nose in our business, but it is our job, with God’s help, to kick him right back out of it! I mean, even I will admit that when I read things I manage to get way too caught up in the wording. Sometimes, I even question the reality of it because I struggle to paint a clear picture in my mind. So, let me help with that a bit. I am going to do my best to pull out my inner Bob Ross here, and use my canvas of words. I am going to do my best, with God’s help, to kick Satan’s doubt out of our belief and understanding of today’s Gospel Reading.

I can’t paint a prettier picture than the ocean or bay that are in rather close proximity to us at most times here in Southern New Jersey… Right? However, we commonly baptize in the Lutheran Church in a different manner, and we do so at the font. So, we are not walking down to a body of water and fully immersing ourselves. I mean, thank goodness for that, it is winter after all! We get the symbolism of things all right here in our church building, even with the furnace running to keep us all warm too.

For that point as well, I would probably not even be going out on the limb here and saying that most of us probably don’t even really remember our baptisms. Yes, there may be pictures or videos, or we may get told how cute our outfit was, or how much we cried that day. However, it is pretty common tradition or practice that we were baptized when we were infants, and not as adults. So, that is a little different nature to things than that which is presented in our Gospel Reading today for sure.

Now, I know we replaced all of our roofs over the past few years. However, I know for certain that we did not sign any contracts to have Seashore Construction install a retractable church roof that opens like Mercedes-Benz Stadium in Atlanta, Georgia. So, we cannot really see when the skies are opening up for us per se. However, it does not mean that they are not when God is calling you his own right over there at the baptismal font.

I also do know for certain that I did not go over to Patti’s Party World and rent a dove. So, we will not have any videos of me or a Pastor presiding over a baptism releasing it from a box so that it can descend down upon us. Or for that fact, fly around the church and swoop over all of us and mess up our hair dos, or do anything else goofy. Again, I encourage you to catch the symbolism, and not solely be focused in the act. For the Holy Spirit moves for us, and within us. The dove is only a symbol so we can even try to picture things within our minds.

Unfortunately, I also did not reach out to James Earl Jones’ agent and have his bellowing voice coming down from the rafters and announce us as if his voice were coming straight out of heaven. I mean, I really do not think that is in our budget. However, God is happy to announce you, just like Jesus, as his own, and he is proud of you. Again, I am just trying to put some perspective on things here.

Now, I am not up here trying to minimize the events that occurred in our Gospel Reading today by any shape, way, or form. I am surely not making a farce of the occurrences. With all of this I only hope that I painted a little different picture in your minds so that we can have a little more context, or can even relate to things a little bit more.

Alright, enough of the funny business, let’s get serious here. We get to picture things this way. John is following his call. He is baptizing people into the faith, or for that fact into the family of believers. He knows he is a tool, or an instrument, that has been set forth to follow God’s purpose. However, as he is standing there the last thing he expects is for Jesus to walk up and get in line and demand to be baptized by him! I mean that would be like your Boss walking up to you and telling you to go in and do her job for the day. You may not think that you are exactly up to that, and neither did John. He did not feel worthy of the responsibility getting placed upon him. However, just as your Boss might tell you… you got this… we need you. Jesus tells John the same things… you got this… we need you… and more importantly he tells John… “Let it be so now; for it is proper for us in this way to fulfill all righteousness.” (1) We really see here that God’s plan respects no titles, degrees, or positions.

We even get to learn that “Matthew is the only gospel writer to record John’s objection. John knows who Jesus is and realizes that Jesus doesn’t need to be baptized. Jesus insists on being baptized by John.” (2) “By his baptism, Jesus was identifying himself with all of humanity; he was placing himself on the level of all of us who sin and fall short of God’s glory. Jesus not only shed his godliness and took on human form he also opened himself up to all that is human.” (2)

It was a major turn of events! The man who never committed a sin became willing to take on the blame of the world. All of a sudden “He was guilty of disobeying his parents and talking back. He was guilty of losing his temper and lashing out with his words. He was guilty of loving money, envying what others had, trusting health and wealth for happiness. He was guilty of indecent thoughts, mean-spirited words, loveless actions. He was guilty of neglecting God's word and of misusing God's name. He was guilty of laziness in prayer and slowness to speak God's truth. He was guilty of dishonoring God, not holding him in the highest reverence and regard.” (3) Just like we were uncomfortable thinking about some of these things recently in Lutheranism 101, all of a sudden “That's what Jesus was guilty of: The sins that you and I have committed. I don't mean that he did the same sins we do. He didn't. He himself never sinned. But all our own sins were charged against him - and not only ours. Jesus was guilty of eating the forbidden fruit, of naked drunkenness, of adultery with Uriah's wife, of betraying the Son of God. Yes, the sins of Adam, Noah, David, and Judas. He was guilty of genocide and mass murder, the sins of Hitler, Stalin, Pol Pot and the worst criminals and tyrants. Every sin was charged against Jesus. That's why Jesus came to be baptized, to wash away all the sins of the world, yours and mine included.” (3)

Let us be reminded that "Jesus’ baptism was also the beginning of his public ministry. The gospels do not contain any reference to Jesus before this event except for his birth and a temple visit when he was twelve years-old. Once empowered with the Holy Spirit Jesus sets out on his ministry.” (2) We get the meat and potatoes here, not all the back story and stuff that are not extremely vital to our salvation.

So, we are also reminded that, “Our baptism is also the beginning of our ministry as servants of God. We are empowered by the Holy Spirit. We live to honor God with our words and deeds. We love others and seek to serve them with our talents and abilities. We march to the beat of a different drummer. Life becomes more than merely making ends meet, or making it to retirement. God uses baptism and changes us at the very core of our being.” (2)

Let me also share this with you. “In the first part of Martin Luther’s explanation of baptism, the reformer makes this point: “Baptism is not just plain water, but it is water used by God’s command and connected with God’s Word.” We need to remind ourselves of this truth that baptism is not a church ceremony. It’s not a ritual dreamed up by men thousands of years ago. Baptism is something that God himself designed and sanctioned. Therefore, baptism is important. Jesus emphasized its importance by being baptized himself.” (4)

Furthermore, “Matthew describes a scene that we can hardly imagine. When he said that heaven was opened he wasn’t just saying that the sun managed to poke through the clouds; he was describing how God’s blazing glory burned through the skies. Accompanying this heavenly display was the Father’s voice marking who Jesus was…. Not only did the Father identify Jesus as his Son, he went on to put his mark of approval on what Jesus had come to do when he said that he was “well-pleased” with Jesus.” (4)

“Jesus did not “receive,” God’s Spirit for the first time at his baptism any more than he became God’s Son at that time. He always was divine, always was Spirit, always was. This experience is a marker, a making explicit- first for the human Jesus, who like all of us could use the encouragement of God that his signs bestow, and then for all of us- just who Jesus is, what he does and how. The voice reveals that Jesus is God’s Son and so divine.” (5)

“As a result of Baptism’s grace we are empowered to do things we otherwise neither could nor would do, things like forgiving, giving, interrupting our own schedule to help someone else, spending our energies on others rather than on ourselves, healing through loving, loving despite not liking, being able to sense, scent, bask in and enjoy the otherwise hidden and unbidden presence of the eternal dimension, God himself, in every experience and every moment. Without that affirmation, that assurance from an infallible, all-knowing, all-loving source, we would be nothing and would do nothing worthwhile. With that affirmation we know that “who,” we are is really “whose we are,” God’s children, and what we do is less important than why we do it.” (5)

With all of this said, the point I am trying to get to is that if we have expectations or desires, then instead of talking about it, or expecting someone else to step up, we need to be about it. We can’t be scared and avoid things because we can’t make any sense of it. We need to be the very ones to set that example! We need to be just like Jesus when he went down to meet John at the Jordan River. We need to trust fully in the message we hear, and embrace things so that we can get what is ours, and share it with others too.

Amen.

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**Matthew 3:13-17**

Before Jesus begins his ministry, he is baptized by John, touched by the Spirit, and identified publicly as God’s child.

13Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan, to be baptized by him. 14John would have prevented him, saying, “I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?” 15But Jesus answered him, “Let it be so now; for it is proper for us in this way to fulfill all righteousness.” Then he consented. 16And 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. 17And a voice from heaven said, “This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased.”