

Sermon: "Come to the Waters!"

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Presented by Bruce Smith (THANK YOU!!!)

Introduction

My, my, time sure does fly when you're having fun!
It seems like only last week
we were talking about the Wise Men paying a visit to the baby Jesus...
the child who could barely speak....
and now, here we are celebrating
the baptism of Jesus the man,
all grown up,
with a beard and everything.
Oh wait, that's because it was only last week!

I wonder how we got from Away in the Manger and Silent Night
all the way to Shall We Gather at the River
in just one week?
It seems like we missed a couple of decades in the story, no?

But that is indeed the story
that we have written down for us.

I guess we are to assume that Jesus
kept things pretty low key way
up until this point.
I'm sure he did all the typical things
that we would expect
during the first 20-some years of life
in the early Middle East.

So, Jesus' childhood,
as far as we can tell,
was rather ordinary.

He likely followed after his parents
when he was little,
looking up to them
and learning from them the basics of life.
He probably was energetic and clumsy
like any other child.

And, no doubt,
he went to temple
like all the other young Jewish boys.
Religion and the rest of his life were likely greatly intertwined.

And as he became a teenager,
maybe he went through a stage of rebellion.
He probably tested boundaries and limits
like everybody else, yes.

And when he became an adult,
he probably entered a period of self-discovery,
asking deep questions about life and himself.
And he probably passed the time working with his hands -
a carpenter like his father.

So, there was no claim to fame in those early years;
nothing that the biblical writers
felt they needed to write down
in any case.

As Jesus went about his day,
most people would look at him
and see an average Joe.
Remember, there were only a few people who witnessed his birth.
And for those who had heard the story in passing,
it was ancient history at this point -
yesterday's news.

So, keeping all of this in mind,
the question that I can't get out of my mind is:
Who cares?
I'm serious. Why did anyone care?

I mean, on top of no one really knowing him at the time,
hundreds of other people had been baptized
and nobody made a big deal about that.
There were no parties, no cake,
no stained-glass windows

Why was Jesus' baptism so important
that it is recorded in all four gospels of our Bible?
There is hardly any other event in the Bible
that's mentioned more than one time
let alone four times!
I wonder what it was that garnered such attention....

Public Appearance

Well, this was like Jesus' first public appearance,
his debut.
He was sort of like a debutante at a ball;
he was coming out to the world.

On the banks of the Jordan River,
this was the moment he decided to step out of the shadows
and to let his light shine.
He stepped forward and said, "Here I am, world!"

But there was no particular reason
that anyone should have noticed...

But...
you know what...
they did.

There was just something about him,
this Jesus fellow,
that got their attention,
that drew them in,
that made them want to know more.

We might say that there was a light in his eyes.
Have you ever met someone like that?

I can say
I've met a couple of people like that
in my life.
People whose eyes sparkle,
whose every move seems memorizing.

Someone who just has something about them;
who you want to be around;
who you just instinctively know is special
in some inexplicable way.

Well, Jesus was like that
to those watching him
slowly walk into the river that day.

And while everyone watched,
his cousin John baptized him,
like he had done to so many others.

Holy Moment

We have all witnessed baptisms
and they are all special moments.
But we are told that Jesus' baptism was really special.

John took his hand
and pushed him down into the water
and Jesus came up somehow changed.

There was a feeling of the divine
in the whole event.
Onlookers said it was like
a dove came down from heaven
and touched Jesus.

Most of us have been lucky to experience holy moments like that -
where it feels like God is right there beside us;
where we can feel the breath of God on the air.

I have experienced that a number of times
as I watched ministers be ordained
or couples exchange their wedding vows.

I certainly felt that
in a big way
when I held my son for the first time.

And it has happened to me on mountaintops
and in front of beautiful sunsets.

And it has even happened
when I have heard a powerful piece of music.

You know, what I mean.
When your breath gets taken away.
You feel this amazing power
or overwhelming comfort.
It may even bring tears to your eyes.

Well, Jesus' baptism was a moment like that.

And we can only imagine what it would have felt like
for the people those who were gathered around.

All of their lives,
they had the words of the Prophet Isaiah spoken to them
through the Hebrew scriptures
while they sat in worship
or listened to stories told at home.
Words of promise and hope,
telling them that God
was going to raise up a leader someday...
a light for the world....
one who would do such marvellous things.

Like the passage we just heard.
It said that this leader would change everything.
Where there was wrongdoing,
he would make things right.
Where there was darkness,
he would bring light.

So, in this moment,
as a soaking wet Jesus emerged from the River Jordan,
perhaps the word of God rang out in their ears,
as spoken through Isaiah's voice.

The Message Translation of the Bible puts it this way:

“Take a good look at my servant.
I’m backing him to the hilt.
He’s the one I chose,
and I couldn’t be more pleased with him.
I’ve bathed him with my Spirit, my life.
He’ll set everything right among the nations.
He won’t call attention to what he does
with loud speeches or gaudy parades.
He won’t brush aside the bruised and the hurt
and he won’t disregard the small and insignificant,
but he’ll steadily and firmly set things right.
He won’t tire out and quit.
He won’t be stopped
until he’s finished his work—
to set things right on earth.”

Matthew in his re-telling of the events
put it much more simply.
He said that:
"A voice from heaven said,
"This is my Son, the Beloved,
with whom I am well pleased."

Whatever happened exactly,
whatever words were or were not spoken that day,
one thing is for sure:
The people who were there
felt joy in their bones.

Commitment

And what about Jesus himself?

We don't know exactly what his reaction was.
No one tells us if he smiled or wiped away tears.

While we don't know his reaction,
we do know what his intentions were.

Jesus made a very conscious decision that day.
He made a choice to get wet,
to be baptized,
to mark himself as God's servant.

More than that,
he made a commitment
to live a certain way,
to engage in his faith
and see where that would take him,
to hand himself over to God
and see what would happen.
And he did this,
even though he didn't quite know
what that would mean for his life.

That alone is pretty inspiring,
when you think about it.
I mean, he could have chosen any path.
Perhaps an easier path
would seem more appealing.
Or at least one that let him have
more control over his life.

It's hard to set out
and not really know where you are going.
It's hard to trust in something outside of yourself,
especially when that something is an invisible force like God.

But he did it! He chose it.
He chose to have faith, to let God do the guiding.

Conclusion

Ok.

Now that we have spent a little time
at the water's edge,
I have to admit
that I'm starting to see
why this baptism thing
was a bigger deal
than perhaps it first appeared.

It's a beautiful story of commitment to faith
and a belief in the presence of God.

It's a story of recognizing light in your life.
It's inspiring and challenging
and maybe just maybe
it's relevant to our own journeys too.

Maybe ever now and again
it's good for us to come to the waters
and to hear about what has happened there
so that we too might have faith,
and make commitments.

So that we might glimpse
the light of the world.