

**Sermon: "Come to the Waters!"**

**Sunday, January 12, 2014**

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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.