

Sermon: “Let it be”

Scripture: Matthew 3:13-17, Acts 10:28-44

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Our Gospel reading comes from Matthew 3:13-17. This passage is a well-known verse of Jesus’ baptism, our King’s anointing. It is interesting to take a notice of what took prior to Jesus coming to John to be baptized; People were coming to John the Baptist to the river Jordan to confess their sins, including many Pharisees and Sadducees.¹ Listen now to the Word of the Lord.

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

¹ Matthew 3:6-7

Our second reading comes from Acts 10:28-44, a story about Simon Peter and a centurion named Cornelius. They had a vision from the Lord: for Peter about what are clean and not clean, while Cornelius called out and invited Simon, risking his own position as a centurion by displacing Emperor's orders and authority as secondary to God's call. Hear now the Word of the Lord.

Peter said to them, "You yourselves know that it is unlawful for a Jew to associate with or to visit a Gentile; but God has shown me that I should not call anyone profane or unclean. ²⁹ So when I was sent for, I came without objection. Now may I ask why you sent for me?"

³⁰ Cornelius replied, "Four days ago at this very hour, at three o'clock, I was praying in my house when suddenly a man in dazzling clothes stood before me. ³¹ He said, 'Cornelius, your prayer has been heard and your alms have been remembered before God. ³² Send therefore to Joppa and ask for Simon, who is called Peter; he is staying in the home of Simon, a tanner, by the sea.' ³³ Therefore I sent for you immediately, and you have been kind enough to come. So now all of us are here in the presence of God to listen to all that the Lord has commanded you to say."

³⁴ Then Peter began to speak to them: "I truly understand that God shows no partiality, ³⁵ but in every nation anyone who fears God and does what is right is acceptable to God. ³⁶ You know the message God sent to the people of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ—he is Lord of all. ³⁷ That message spread throughout Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John announced: ³⁸ how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power; how he went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him. ³⁹ We are witnesses to all that he did both in Judea and in Jerusalem. They put him to death by hanging him on a tree; ⁴⁰ but God raised him on the third day and allowed him to appear, ⁴¹ not to all the people but to us who were chosen by God as witnesses, and who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. ⁴² He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one ordained by God as judge of the living and the dead. ⁴³ All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name."

While Peter was still speaking, the Holy Spirit fell upon all who heard the word.

Sermon: “Let it be”

Text: : Jesus answered John the Baptist, “Let it be so now; for it is proper for us in this way to fulfill all righteousness.” Matthew 3:15

Let us Pray:

Holy God, who hovered over the waters at creation’s birth, who descended in the form of a dove at Jesus’ baptism: Come to us, open our hearts and minds, so that we may hear the Word of life and be renewed by your power. May the words of my mouth and the meditation of all our hearts be pleasing to you our Rock and Redeemer. Amen.

Today, we need to talk about something that I find tough to do in my personal life and something that we all have in common. On Baptism of the Lord Sunday as we remember our own baptisms, we need to let God be God in our lives by letting go and letting God have control.

Let’s admit it folks. We want control. I too am a victim of this mindset. Ask my wife how often I let her drive when we are going somewhere together. Only after multiple energy drinks or cups of coffee would I admit defeat to tiredness and reluctantly relinquish the steering wheel. Even as I am reclining my chair and drifting into a controlled 15 – 30-minute nap, I will be a back-seat driver until my eyelids cannot be controlled and closes out my vision. My short experience in fatherhood tells me that I am usually on the losing end of trying to control the kids. Even in my own sermons, one thing I thought I had a full control over in my vocation, God showed me that it is God who is in control exactly a year ago. As I was preaching a sermon titled, “You are Mine” on the Baptism of the Lord Sunday, I had what I thought a great illustration of a crushed dollar bill. As some of you remember, as I was stepping onto that dollar bill, God amplified that sound, as what later was revealed to be snow sliding off the sanctuary roof. I have kept that dollar, and because of its a fearful and awesome reminder, I keep it in a drawer.

The good news is that God still reaches out to us to be partners in God’s work, in God’s ministry. Jesus’ older cousin, John the Baptist, who is the greatest man born² according to Jesus is preparing the way of the Lord by baptizing and calling people to repentance in the river Jordan. When Pharisees and Sadducees, who later plot against Jesus, were coming too, to be baptized, John called them brood of vipers and warned of Jesus’ power and authority. How John’s baptism was symbolic one with water, but Jesus will baptize with the Holy Spirit and fire.

John the Baptist was living out the calling of God in the fullest way. Ministering to all and baptizing friendly, needy, and even the enemy. He was expecting Jesus to come and rescue him too, as he saw his own reflection on the waters that he was baptizing broken people, mirroring the same brokenness that he was washing away within back to him. But God had a different mindset. Jesus came to John, not to baptize John but to be baptized by him. But John wanted to have it his way. This is not what he envisioned. This is not right, for he knew the brokenness within. He wanted the burden of ministry to be lifted and simply pass the baton to Jesus and say I have finished my race. John stopped Jesus and said, “I need to be baptized by you!” The focus text of this sermon, which at first perplexed me, is the response Jesus gave to John: “**Let it be** so now; for it is proper for **us** in this way to fulfill all righteousness.”³

Two things jump out in Jesus’ response. 1) Jesus says ‘let it be’ to fulfill all righteousness. Jesus is Son of God. He does not need a validation or verification. He does not need a Holy Spirit crowning ceremony to

² Matthew 11:11

³ Matthew 3:15, emphasis mine.

affirm who he is. At his whisper, armies of angels would gather and ready to heed his command.⁴ But for our sake, for humanity to witness the door of heaven opening and the glory of God descend upon him to make us believe, Jesus let it be. Jesus let God be in control of the moment and his life. 2) Jesus came to John to make him a partner in his ministry. As a Son of God, Jesus can do things on his own. But Jesus calls for ministry partners, to be disciples, to be co-heirs. Jesus tells John that it is proper for “us” to fulfill all righteousness. We have a part in Jesus’ ministry. We are called to let God work within us and through us to fulfill all righteousness. Only way that is accomplished is when we let go of our agenda and let God have control. This does not mean that we simply be passive in what we do; but like John, with our given talent and calling, we actively participate in sharing God’s love and build God’s kingdom here on earth.

The second point is further illustrated by the second reading where Peter, the rock that Jesus built his church⁵, had to be reminded that it is God who is in control. Like Elijah, God called Peter three times in a dream, telling him “what God has made clean, do not call common or unclean.”⁶ As Peter testified in the reading, as a Jew, he was accountable to the worldly laws and authority. Cornelius was held to obeying orders. Yet these two men let God be in control, acting upon their calling from the Lord. When they came together, they had undertaken equal parts in bringing God’s glory to the Gentiles, where the Holy Spirit fell on all who heard the word in their presence.

Friends, our life experiences tell us this one truth about control. Truly there is only one thing that we can control: our own decisions. We cannot control even our own body without making the healthy decisions of what to eat and when to exercise. Let us make a choice today to let it be and let go in order that God can take over our lives. As Apostle Paul shared with us, “we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love God, who have been called according to God’s purpose.”⁷ Let us come together, answering God’s call through our baptism and ask the blessing of the Holy Spirit falling on us as it was with John the Baptist, Simon Peter, and Cornelius in today’s Scripture. Amen.

⁴ Matthew 4:6

⁵ Matthew 16:18

⁶ Acts 10:15-16

⁷ Romans 8:28