



## Morrison Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church

[www.mzluth.org](http://www.mzluth.org)

January 13, 2008

1<sup>st</sup> Sunday after Epiphany

Matthew 3:13-17

Pastor Randy Ott

First Lesson: Isaiah 42:1-7

Psalm of the Day: Psalm 2

Second Lesson: Acts 10:34-38

Gospel: Matthew 3:13-17

### Let It Be So Now

I don't know what the mornings are like on Sunday morning before you get ready to come to church, if there are certain rituals you go through in your household, but at our household when I was growing up, there was the same ritual repeated every week, unintentional as it might have been. Dad always liked to get to church, to me as a kid it seemed like three days before church started. He always wanted to be there about a half hour early, and that seemed like forever. On Sunday mornings as a kid, I didn't always get out of bed the quickest and didn't move the fastest, and Dad would always be hounding us, "Let's get going. We have ten minutes before we go. We have five minutes before we go," and on and on. As a kid, I was probably like a lot of you kids here today—busy chasing my tail, running around looking for my shoes that somehow mysteriously walked away from wherever I set them down, at least I thought so. I would be running around doing this and doing that and not moving that fast, and pretty soon you knew it was serious when—our garage was right down the steps from the kitchen—you would hear the horn sound in the car and you would hear it repeat itself. You knew it was "let it be so now." Get in the car and leave or face the wrath of Dad. There was no more debating. There was no more "why do we have to go so early?" There was no more "we can wait a little bit." If the horn sounded, you better be in the car or you would face an unpleasant father.

I suppose that horn for me was kind of like Jesus coming to John the Baptist and saying, "I need to be baptized by you." And John seemed to have reasons why it shouldn't happen. "I can't do that. I should be baptized by you." But Jesus said, "Let it be so now." That was the end of the discussion. Then John consented. That's kind of what the horn was like for me as a child growing up. John humbly submitted to the One that he knew was greater than he was.

I suppose that is why he tried to deter him, don't you think? He had told the people, "Look! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world." He had said, "There is One coming after me who is greater than I am. I baptize you with water. But he is going to baptize you with the Spirit. I'm not even worthy of stooping down and untying his sandals or tying them up. He is that much greater than I am, and I am that much lesser." Now here is the One who John had said that about and he was saying, "I need to be baptized by you." And John was saying, "No! It can't be! I should be baptized by you! You are the greater, I am the lesser." He is dead on in that observation, but his idea that he knew more than God was wrong.

I think the thing to learn from John here is that he, at least from what we can tell, he consented and it didn't sound like he argued with Jesus ad nauseam at times like we are inclined to argue with God.

Sometimes in our lives God says, "Let it be so now. This is what is going to happen in your life and you are going to have to face it. You are going to have to face it with me at your side. You won't have to face it alone." But there are things that happen in our lives—sicknesses, financial setbacks, relationship problems, trouble just getting along with one another—and we wonder why in the world God would allow some of these difficulties to come into our lives. We live in a sinful world, and there are going to be the things that come because of sin. God isn't sending them to us to punish us. He has already punished all of our sins in Christ. God allows them into our lives so that we end up learning to walk closer to him. There comes a time when we need to trust in the Lord and rely not on our own understanding and just consent and listen.

That is what we see John doing this morning. Jesus said, "Let it be so now." And John consented. But I think one of the interesting things now, when you see that, that much I can grasp. I can wrap my mind around that pretty well. I need to just shut up and listen to God and not tell God what to do. I get that even though I don't always live that. I'm sure you don't always live that, but that I can understand. But when Jesus says to John, "You have to baptize me to fulfill all righteousness," that one is a little harder for my simple mind to wrap itself around.

Righteousness—what is righteousness? I suppose an easy way to remember it is to be "right" with God. You have to be perfect. You don't try your best. You don't try hard. You don't find someone that is worse than you are. You don't give it the old solid effort. God says to be righteous. You have to be absolutely perfect.

You and I, when we are born into this world, we are not righteous. We are sinners from birth, sinful from the time our mothers conceived us is what the Book of Psalms tells us. Jesus however was born without sin. When you and I were baptized, we were baptized for righteousness in that God says, "Be baptized for the forgiveness of your sins." He tells us that in the Book of Acts. Baptism now saves you. It makes you righteous. It gives you the forgiveness of sins. He tells us that in the Book of Titus. But that is not the case in Jesus' baptism—to fulfill all righteousness.

That is why Jesus came to earth, right?—to be righteous in our place because you and I are not righteous. God demands that you and I be holy, and we can't do it. We don't want to do it. We don't have the ability. We don't have the desire. By our own, we are spiritually blind, spiritually dead, and enemies of God. But God sends himself. The Son comes to earth and he fulfills all righteousness. He is holy. He is perfect in our place. So in some way, shape or form, Jesus standing in the waters of the Jordan being baptized is a part of what he was doing to provide righteousness for you and me.

He wasn't baptized for the forgiveness of sins, which is what John's baptism was—"repentance for the forgiveness of sins" he had said. He was baptized to fulfill all righteousness.

They talk about Jesus' obedience in two terms in good theological books. They talk about the active obedience of Jesus where he actively obeys all of the laws in our place to keep them all perfectly so when God looks at us, he sees perfection. That part of his ministry Jesus would have already been doing from the time he was born until that time. He had obeyed all of the laws perfectly. He had loved his neighbor as himself. He had obeyed his parents. He had done all the things that the law demanded of him perfectly, in our place, even before he began his public ministry. In a sense, you could say this is the start of his public ministry. He is anointed into his office as prophet, priest and king at his baptism to begin the public part of his ministry where he shows himself to be the Messiah through his powerful miracles and through his powerful teachings where he begins the path, the journey that leads to outside of Jerusalem. When he stands in that Jordan river and he is baptized, he knows that the path he had begun there, the beginning of his public ministry, is going to end up about three years later carrying a cross through Jerusalem to the outside of the city walls and then being nailed to that cross.

He begins his passive obedience where he suffers the punishment that our sins deserve—all of God's wrath is poured out on him. So he stands in that Jordan River and in a sense is saying, "I will take the place of all those who I am going to die for. I am standing alongside of them even though I am not a sinner like they are. I will take their sins upon me, and I will walk the path that takes me back up to Galilee, down to Jerusalem, through Peria, that takes me all over to preach the good news and say the kingdom of God is near. But I know it is going to lead me to some slivers scraping against my wide open back that has been laid bare by a whipping as I hang on the cross for the sins of the world." And he does that so that all righteousness would be fulfilled, so that our sins would not only be paid for, but so that he would be perfect in our place so that we stand completely and absolutely holy before God.

That is what Jesus is doing here to fulfill all righteousness. It's an amazing thing. It's a love that goes beyond really fully comprehending. Certainly we appreciate the love he has shown for us in providing us perfection and taking away our sins and being the punishment for our sins. We love him to death for it. The love of God fills our hearts and our souls, but can I completely understand the depth of that love?—probably not on this side of heaven, because I am still corrupted by my own sinful nature. I'm still troubled at times and try to think that I know better than God, just like I suppose you do. But God has taken away all those sins where we have told him what he should be doing better, where we have doubted his love, where we have complained about his treatment of us; all those sins were carried to the cross and all the perfection that we need, Jesus carried out perfectly as our servant, our Messiah.

Now just so that everyone would know this to be the case, some other amazing things take place at Jesus' baptism. Remember in Matthew 18 where we studied about church discipline. You go and show someone who has sinned their fault just between the two of you and if they don't listen, it says to take one or two others along. Then it quotes an Old Testament passage—so that every matter may be established by two or three witnesses. This was one of the principles of Jewish law. If someone came and said something, unless they had someone who would back them up, you wouldn't listen to them. You wouldn't view their testimony as valid. In reality, we are confronted in these

readings with testimonies beyond Jesus himself saying, “I am the light of the world” or “I am the way, the truth and the light.” Here we have the Spirit saying “This is the One.” In the Book of Isaiah he said, “I’ll pour out my Spirit on him.” Here it happens. He is anointed with the Holy Spirit as the Spirit comes down in the form of a dove so that people could know that God was placing his seal of approval on Jesus as the One who would take away our sins. Then we have the Father’s voice, “You are my Son. Today I have become your Father.” It says that in Psalm 2. Here we have words to that effect where the Father says, “This is my Son, whom I love. With him I am well pleased.”

In the other gospel accounts we are told he also said, “Listen to him.” Just like Jesus spoke a command, “Let it be so now,” the Father speaks a command—“Listen to him.” This is his testimony. The Spirit says he is the Messiah. The Father says, “This is my Son. I’m happy with what he is doing. He is fulfilling my will. He is doing what I have sent him to do. Now here is my testimony to you—listen to him.” The way we listen is through Word and Sacraments. That is where the Spirit works in our hearts to bring us closer to God, to grow in our faith, and to grow in our knowledge. There are a lot of competing voices for our ears in the world today. A lot of them want to lead us in a direction that is not closer to God.

You and I are privileged by God to be able to listen to Jesus every day of our lives as we get into the Word. You and I are privileged to begin every day of our lives remembering that we are baptized children of God who have had our sins washed away. And every time we have sinned and we say, “Look, forgive me, I have screwed up again,” we return to the waters of our baptism where our sins were washed away and we were clothed with Jesus’ perfection. You and I listen to his voice as we come to the Lord’s Supper and we receive his very body and blood and he says, “You are forgiven. Go in peace.”

The testimony is there from John the Baptist—“Look, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.” The testimony is there that we heard this morning from Peter who said, “I have seen the Holy Spirit come on him in power.” And the testimony is there from the Father and the Spirit. The Father is pleased and he isn’t afraid to tell anyone about it.

Isn’t that interesting? The Father is pleased and he is not afraid to tell anyone about it? Is that how we are? Or are we the exact opposite—we are upset about something and we are not afraid to tell anyone about it. Which is it more often? I have something I don’t like that is going on at church—I keep it to myself, or I tell everyone in sight? God has blessed me personally in my life. He has taken away my sins. “Oh, you can’t talk about religion. You just can’t talk about that.”

You and I are upside down at times, aren’t we? We are looking backwards when we should be forwards. We are doing the exact opposite at times of what God has called us to do and yet, God’s love for you and me is so strong that he takes away our sin for the times that we spend all our time talking about the negative and not talking about how God has blessed us, all the times when we have opportunities to witness and we change the subject, all the times that we have done that, God has forgiven us.

And I suppose, as we come to appreciate that truth more and more and more, more and more and more we will want to tell others the good news!