

# **“John Consented”**

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Providence United Methodist Church

**BAPTISM OF THE LORD**

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The gospel lesson for today is taken from the third chapter of Matthew, verses 13 through 17. I'll be reading from the New Revised Standard Version. Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan, to be baptized by him. John would have prevented him, saying, “I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?” 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. 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. And a voice from heaven said, “This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased.” This is God's word for God's people. Thanks be to God.

Let us pray. Heavenly Father, who gave Jesus God's only Son for the world, who came down and put on flesh and dwelt among us, touch us in this place today. Move us, rekindle our hearts with God's thinking, and generate a new attitude within us to hear your voice. Grant us understanding of your word, and let it grow and produce the fruit of revelation. In Christ's name we pray. Amen. Matthew, Mark, and Luke are called the synoptic gospels, meaning that they have a common view and have similar content, order, and statements. John's gospel is different; it was written considerably later than the first three gospels. The gospel of John is more theologically developed than the other three gospels which largely aim to provide a biography of Jesus' life.

Now, let's go back to the text that was read concerning John the Baptist's reaction to Jesus. Scripture states that John would have stopped Jesus from being

baptized by him if he could have. I imagine when John grasped the awareness of what Jesus wanted him to do he was taken back and quite shocked at Jesus' request. In the gospels of Mark and Luke, John the Baptist said he wasn't worthy to untie his sandals. In Matthew's account, in so many words, John says to Jesus, "You're the one. Baptize me. This is how it's supposed to be."

Humans tend to think in hierarchical ways many times. We go into a situation where we're serving the poor and feeding the hungry and conceptualize our role as being the one who will bless by giving. In reality, we're the ones who are blessed the most. I'm sure the VIM teams from this church that are sent out quickly identify with that thought. The giver becomes the prime beneficiary in the process.

John thought that Jesus should be baptizing *him*; after all, Jesus was the superior one. So what happens is what Jesus did all through his ministry. Jesus turns the tables upside down. Jesus says, come on John; this is how it's going to be. So they fulfill righteousness together—Jesus and John. Scripture states that John consents. He agrees. He moves forward. He gets on God's side. He doesn't reason very long with Jesus even if it makes absolutely no sense to him. John willingly yields and doesn't let his objection carry much weight for very long. He listens to God's Son.

I think when John consented something wonderful happened in heaven. Of course John made a choice. He was hand-picked and chosen especially for this ministry, but haven't we all been hand-picked for a ministry? Haven't we all gifts to share, a path to walk, and choices to make that God uses to advance the kingdom? When John consented and yielded to God's plan look what happened. The heavens opened, the Spirit of God descended like a dove, and a voice was heard from heaven affirming that Jesus was God's own Son.

I think about how many choices we have in life to advance the kingdom of God. In the moment the choices may seem insignificant, but when we look back on the choices we've made they become very significant in our lives and the lives of others. John the Baptist heard the voice of God, and he consented. How many times do we hear God's voice? We hear it in a number of different ways. In preaching, teaching, advice from a trusted friend, in youth group, in committee meetings when we have devotion, and yet many times we choose our own way. We leave God out of our decision making. Our way at the moment of decision is not necessarily wrong, but it's not God's way. Maybe we take the easy way out. We look at God's way, and it looks like a way of pain or simply too much trouble. It doesn't even make sense to us. Arg, who the heck wants more pain in life, life is hard enough. So we choose the less painful way . . . . . or so we think. We choose our way.

My challenge to you this morning is this. Let's aim to hear the voice of God as we make our decisions. Let's not be in such a rush to do what we want. Let's consider God's way. Let's try to acknowledge God's presence in our lives by including God in our decision making. It may not be the easiest way, but in the end, it's the best way. It may not be what we call the path of least resistance, but it's God's way, and God's way is The Way. One of the most difficult things for me to sometimes do is to choose God's way. Often God's way doesn't make sense to me. It's hard for me to yield and surrender my will to God. I'd rather reason with God and attempt to change God's thinking, but I know, God's way is the right way.

The Old Testament reading for today comes from the book of Isaiah 42. Verse 9 says this, "See, the former things have come to pass, and new things I now declare; before they spring forth, I tell you of them." God was doing a new thing when Jesus put on flesh. The man Jesus was the express image of God in human

form. A new eon was about to unfold before humanity's eyes. Would we get it? Do we understand this new thing that God is doing or wants to do in our lives? Jesus turned the tables. He did what lords don't do. He served. He gave and didn't take.

My question to you is this. Are you striving to hear God's voice in your life? I know you feel as though life has been tough. I feel the same, but are we listening for God's voice? Are we making the choices that God tries to lead us to make? Or do we end up making too many detours? I challenge you this day. Include God in your decision making. Strive to hear the voice of God in your life. If you decide to leave God out of your decision making, you'll be set on a detour and come right back to the place where you started. Strive to hear the voice of God and yield to God's way. God's way is The Way. Embrace the "new thing" that God has for your life in 2014.

Let's pray. Holy God who plans a way through the detours of our choices, turn the volume up in our hearts dear Lord. Help us hear your voice as we strive to cultivate a closer relationship with you in the decisions we make. Help us make this New Year a year of new life for us as we draw ourselves closer to you—the one who makes our lives worth living. In Christ's name we pray. Amen.