

Matthew 3: 13-17  
The Ordination of Jesus

In the 13<sup>th</sup> chapter of Matthew's gospel Jesus returned to his hometown synagogue in Nazareth and begins to teach the people there what he had been teaching in other cities and villages around the Sea of Galilee. We're not told the specifics of his teachings but his teaching was so impressive that the leaders of the synagogue said, "Where did this man get this wisdom and these deeds of power? Is not this the carpenter's son? Is not his mother called Mary? And are not his brothers James and Joseph and Simon and Judas? And are not all his sisters with us? Where then did this man get all of this?"

In other words, "This man was with us for nearly 30 years. We never heard of him going to rabbinical school. He had no name or reputation of being a man of God. He didn't come from a long line of preachers. His daddy was just a small time carpenter. What's he doing coming here and teaching our people as though he were somebody?"

Jesus replied to their criticisms by simply saying that a preacher or a prophet doesn't get much respect in their hometown or even in their own home. And then we are told that Jesus did not do many deeds of power there, because of their unbelief. Maybe it is from this incident that we get the proverb "familiarity breeds contempt."

Is that not true? A man can leave a community being a nobody, can go out into the world and become rich or famous for some great deeds accomplished, and can then go back home where some of the people who knew him at a young age will say, "He aint so hot. He just got lucky."

It's a well known fact in Methodism that hardly any preacher will ever be sent to his or her home church to be the pastor in charge. I am actually one of the few exceptions to that rule. I pastored my home church for 6 months when the pastor in charge took disability leave in the middle of the year. I was on a leave of absence at the time and I don't believe the district superintendent had anyone else to call to fill that position. Actually, those were 6 of the best months I had in the ministry. The church grew, the attendance and giving kept up, there were no dissensions, but nevertheless when June rolled around I knew I would be appointed to another church. Maybe the reason that everything went so well was because the people realized that I was only going to be there for 6 months. They could put up with anyone for 6 months!

Well, anyway the passage I read this morning in Matthew's gospel is Matthew's answer to the question about Jesus' authority- where he got all the stuff, so to speak, that enabled him to do the things he was able to do. The baptism of Jesus was his "ordination" to begin his public ministry. It was at the Jordan River that Jesus received his authority to begin his ministry of redemption, to win the world for God. John the Baptist did not understand what was going on when Jesus came to him to be baptized. John's baptism was a symbol of repentance. Everyone who received his baptism, except for Jesus, was making a pledge to God that they would turn away from their sins and would begin their lives anew following in the ways of righteousness, preparing for the day when God would send the Messiah, who would bring in the Kingdom of God, putting an end to the tyrannical rule of sin and evil which had the world in its terrible grasp.

When Jesus came to John to be baptized, according to Matthew's account, John already knew who Jesus was. John said to Jesus something like this, "You come to me to receive what I have to offer, when it is really I who need to come to you to receive what you have to offer." John spoke the truth for every preacher who has ever lived. Those of us who preach the gospel and teach the Bible and do all other sorts of religious activities stand just in much of need of forgiveness as the people we preach to and teach. We all have unclean lips and feet of clay. We preachers are no different than the people we preach too except that we have been given authority by our religious denomination to do the religious activities that we do. It's interesting that the only authority our government recognizes from us preachers is the authority to perform wedding ceremonies because marriage is governed by state laws. To be married or to be divorced is governed by the state, not by the church. The state recognizes the authority of people like me to perform the ceremonies, but I can't perform the ceremony unless the state first gives permission to a man and woman to be married. To get that permission both the man and the woman have to meet the laws of the state when it comes to age and kinship. But when it comes to preaching and teaching, burying the dead, presiding over the sacraments, and any other religious function, the state has no jurisdiction and does not care. Anyone here can start your own church, become pastor, preach, teach, baptize, and preside over the Lord's supper. But you cannot perform wedding ceremonies unless you have some ordination document from some institution. And because of the first amendment, guaranteeing the freedom of religion, anyone who wants to can be ordained by sham institutions calling themselves a denomination. Anyone can get an ordination certificate.

Well, as we said, John the Baptist did not think Jesus needed to be baptized by him, and of course he was right. Jesus was not a sinner. Jesus came to take away our sins. Why then did Jesus submit to baptism? Because the movement that John the Baptist initiated was a Messianic movement, a movement to prepare for the coming of the Messiah. All the people who came to be baptized were preparing themselves through repentance to get ready to meet the Messiah on the day he would show up. Well, the day came when the Messiah showed up! Jesus came to the Jordan River as the Messiah to associate himself with the people he came to save. When someone is drowning you can't save them by standing on the banks and screaming out swimming instructions. You have to jump into the water and reach out to the person who is drowning. That is exactly what Jesus was doing on the day he was baptized. He went to where the people were to be baptized with them, not as a sinner but as a Savior.

What happened next was the so called "ordination" of Jesus. It was the moment he received his authority for his ministry. We are told that the heavens were opened to him, the Holy Spirit descended to him like a dove and alighted on him, and that he heard a voice from heaven, in other words God's voice, saying, "This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased."

First, the heavens were opened to him. I interpret this to mean that all the resources of heaven were made available to Jesus to assist him in his mission to win the world to God. In the temptation story where Jesus wrestles with the devil one of the temptations that Jesus has to overcome is the temptation to misuse the power that was given to him. That's always a temptation in the ordained ministry. I read in the paper this past week of one minister who disbanded his board of deacons because he said the board of deacons was an ungodly system imposed on the church. No, the board of deacons was a check on his power and he didn't like it. What he did was an abuse of power and I don't know how he got away with it. Dear people, it's up to you as the church to watch out for the misuse and abuse of ministerial power.

Second, the Spirit of God descended to Jesus and alighted on him like a dove. To me this is a beautiful way of saying that Jesus allowed the Holy Spirit to fill his life. Our home is a good way off the main highway and I would estimate that there must be three hundred feet of electric wire strung on poles to bring electric service to our house. In late summer those electric lines fill up with doves. Those doves are

easily frightened. Every time I drive my car down the driveway they will all fly away. I've even walked under the lines and had them fly away. Linking the Holy Spirit with a dove is a way of saying that the Holy Spirit will only come into a person's life who welcomes the Holy Spirit. There was not a time in his life when the Holy Spirit was absent from Jesus' life. In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus said, "Blessed are the meek." The meek are those who open their hearts to receive the Holy Spirit.

Third, Jesus hears the voice of God saying to him, "This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased." **"This is my Son."** That is a quotation from Psalm 2:7. Psalm 2 is one of the Messianic Psalms where God speaks of his anointed one. The word messiah means the "anointed one." **"With whom I am well pleased."** That is a quotation from Isaiah 42:1. Isaiah 42 is one of the chapters in that book which speaks of the suffering servant of the Lord who in his ministry will bear the sins of his people. We read from that chapter when we began our worship this morning.

When Jesus heard the voice, "This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased," two things were affirmed to him by his heavenly Father. First, it was affirmed to him that he was the long waited for Messiah of Israel. Second, it was affirmed to him what kind of Messiah he would be. He would be the suffering servant Messiah who would bear the sins of his people and of the people of the whole world.

Did Jesus know from the very beginning that he would suffer and die on a cross? I don't know the answer to that. But he did know from the very beginning that accepting the office of Messiah meant for him suffering and humiliation in one form or another. If that would have been me I think that I would have turned around, gone back to Nazareth, and resumed my career as a carpenter.

I've had some difficult times since I've been in the ministry. I probably could write a book. Some of them I brought on myself, some I inherited when I went to a new church, some were misunderstandings that were blown way out of proportion, some came from people with mental illness, some came from people who wanted to hold power in the church and I was in their way, some came from people who were just mean. If I knew from the very beginning some of the things I would have to put up with I wonder if I would have ever become a minister?

Jesus knew from the very beginning what lay in front of him. He knew Isaiah 53:5 would be his experience. "He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed." He knew and yet he went forward, all for our sake.

Let us pray,

O living Christ,

Thank you for bearing our sins and doing for us what we could never do for ourselves. Help us all to rededicate ourselves to take up our crosses and follow you who are the way, the truth and the life.

We pray in your name. Amen.