8-14 January 2023 Let’s do this

Matthew 3:13-17

Read the passage from Matthew. It is written below.

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 fulfil 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.’

Bible notes

The baptism of Jesus is one of the few events in his ministry recorded in all four Gospels. The picture of Jesus offering himself as the Messiah begins in the river Jordan, when he bows his head humbly to receive a baptism for the forgiveness of sins. There is a saying in Orthodox theology that there are three times that the Son of God bowed his head: in his mother’s womb, in the waters of baptism and in the tomb. The moment of his baptism is at the beginning of his ministry, and yet it also reflects the tone of his whole life. He chooses to walk the same path as those who came out into the desert to listen to John the Baptist, hoping to hear God’s promises. He chooses to make this quiet yet definite beginning to his life of service. John’s question to Jesus is understandable: ‘I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?’ Jesus’ answer seems to reflect the Isaiah 42 picture of bringing forth justice without extinguishing even a smouldering wick. ‘Let it be so now’ – this quiet, humble path is the beginning of the fulfilment of ‘righteousness’. We often give this word a personal religious meaning, but ‘righteousness’ also means putting things right judicially, acting with an emphasis on fairness – the justice that God’s Servant would bring.

Reflection

Spend a few moments thinking about what stands out for you from the Bible reading. This idea may help.

The word in the New Testament translated ‘righteousness’ can also be translated ‘justice’. There is not the same separation here between personal goodness and communal fairness that we might make in our culture; these are both part of the process of setting things right. With that in mind, we could picture Jesus coming to his baptism to set things right, to ‘fulfil all justice’. How does changing that one word (or rather, changing its translation into English) change our view of what is happening? What does it mean (for us) that he begins his ministry by sharing in a baptism for the forgiveness of sins – that is, not an anointing or an official commissioning, but an ad hoc religious rite in the wilderness?

**Questions for reflection**

You could also use the image and following questions to help introduce the theme.

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 **Questions**

* How does it feel to start something new?
* Do you sometimes find it hard to start something?
* What holds you back?
* Athletes train and mentally prepare for a race.

How can you get into the right mindset for your faith journey?

## Prayer

Adapt to your local context.

#### **A prayer of thanksgiving**

Most merciful God,
we thank you for your beloved Son Jesus,
who moved into the neighbourhood and lived among us.
Thank you that we too are your beloved.
Thank you that you sent your Son to die and rise again,
so that we might have life and true freedom in you.
Thank you that we have been chosen by you,
and that your love never ends, despite our failings and shortcomings.
Thank you that you chose to come to earth and be flesh among us.
We thank and praise you our heavenly king.
**Amen.**

## **A prayer to end the Bible study**

As Jesus came to the river
**to do what God wanted,**
the Spirit came upon him
**to show that God loved him.**
Send us out from here
**as your beloved children,**
filled with the right attitude
**to share your love with all the world.**
**Amen.**

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