

## On a Mission from God

**Matthew 3:13-17**  
**January 9, 2023**

**First Presbyterian Church**  
**Pastor Dave Carlson**

Philosopher E. Rosenstock-Hussey wrote: “The Christian is one who listens to God speak before speaking – the Church is a group of listening people.”

In his book “Encountering Jesus,” Zan Holmes, Jr., Writer talks about the “preaching congregation and the listening pastor,” saying it’s time to rediscover and recover the biblical tradition of listening before speaking.<sup>1</sup>

Which begs the question, in the midst of all the voices that everyday clamor for your attention, are you listening for God? Are you able to pick out God’s voice from all the other voices? To do that, says Holmes, we must start where Jesus did – at the moment of baptism.

At such moments of new beginning we should listen for Christ’s voice introducing us personally to the Father, saying, “This is my beloved brother;” “This is my beloved sister .... I am well-pleased with them, and I’m sending them out with a mission in the world.”

Today is Baptism of the Lord Sunday, when we celebrate the moment the Spirit of God descended upon Jesus, beginning his ministry, his mission in the world. Matthew tells us that 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?’” Put yourself in John’s place. You’re going about your business, doing your best to serve God and help others and the Lord comes to you with an unexpected request – do unto me as you do unto them; baptize me like you baptize them.

Why would Jesus ask such a thing – to be baptized just like anyone else? I mean, he is the Son of God, right? So John’s response is not surprising, pushing back on Jesus. It just makes no sense to John – that Jesus would need something from him.

How many times do we question it when asked to do something, even if we do sense it’s the right thing to do? There’s 101 reason we can’t – can’t find the time, don’t have the energy, not sure we want to.

And yet, John’s simple act of baptism – which he would have prevented – sets in motion the greatest act of ministry ever known, the life, death and resurrection of the Jesus, and all the miracles, power and promise it brings.

What gets in the way of you receiving these promises, receiving the Holy Spirit, following the Lord in ministry, doing what you ought to do in God’s sight?

---

<sup>1</sup> “Encountering Jesus” (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1992), Zan W. Holmes, Jr., 53-54.

And more importantly, what are you missing out on by not stepping up? How might the Lord bless you through your act of selfless service, unconditional love, sacrificial giving?

First Church is currently seeking individuals to serve as Deacons, Elders and Trustees. The Nominating Committee has made its first round of calls asking people to prayerfully consider this call to service. Seven people have agreed to serve, and four more spots remain open.

Serving as Deacon to ensure our folks continue to feel loved and cared for even when they can't attend anymore, serving as an Elder to ensure our ministry programs remain strong, and serving as a Trustee to ensure our facilities are well maintained – this is holy work. Not always fun. Not always convenient. But holy nonetheless – and often fun, not that inconvenient and full of hidden blessings for both those who serve and those who benefit from their service.

So again, I ask you, how might the Lord bless you through your act of selfless service, unconditional love and sacrificial giving? Maybe like John, it's the blessing of knowing that Jesus is actually calling on you.

John responds to Jesus, saying, "... And do you come to me?" He can't believe that Jesus is calling on him, that John has anything to offer, that his simple act of ministry – baptizing in the Jordan River – could be instrumental in God's grand plan. Don't sell yourself short, people. There's not one person here who isn't important to God's grand plan.

We have each been called into ministry through an encounter with the Lord not unlike John's encounter at the Jordan. At some point, Jesus touched your heart and said, "Come and follow me, and I will make you a blessing to others just as I will be a blessing to you."

Think of all the ways that God has blessed your life. Now think of how you can turn that blessing outward toward others. As you do that – as you think of how your life might serve the Lord – consider the life of William Booth, founder of the Salvation Army. Booth was once asked to explain how and why God had used him so mightily. He gave this explanation, saying, "I will tell you. God has had all there was of me. There have been men with greater brains than I, men with greater opportunities, but from the day I got the poor of London on my heart and the vision of what Jesus Christ could do with the poor of London, I made up my mind that God would have all of William Booth there was. And if there's anything of power in the Salvation Army ... it is because God has had all the adoration of my heart, the power of my will, and all the influence of my life."

Think of all the ways that God has blessed your life and how you might turn that blessing outward toward others – maybe through your financial support of programs that help the needy. Maybe it's by going out of your way to lend assistance. For some, it's using our gifts and talents to bring others closer to the Lord. Lot's of ways to be in ministry alongside Jesus.

And all of them start by receiving the invitation of the Lord, by making room for Jesus in your life, by giving all you are to the calling God has placed upon your heart, and not resisting that calling.

At first, John was resistant. John sought to prevent Jesus from being baptized by him. But Jesus said, "Let it be so now; for it is proper for us in this way to fulfill all righteousness." Let it be so, now. Sometimes it's as simple as just letting it be, letting it be as it is, as it unfolds.

Instead of fighting against things or trying to control or manipulate events, perhaps try just let things unfold and see what happens. We're not always sure we can do it or that we have the time to spare. But if you're a person of faith, then you can trust that God will guide you in fulfilling God's purpose.

The key to ensuring that we are in tune with God's purpose is simply to be the person God desires you to be. God has called you to make a difference in this world by just being you. At your baptism, God chose you as a beloved child of God, in the Spirit of Jesus Christ, the one with whom God was well pleased.

God is well pleased with Jesus because Jesus seeks to please God, which he does, with a sense of humility, coming alongside the masses gathered at the Jordan River to serve as God would have him serve.

Well, we, too, are called to do what is pleasing to God, and to do so with humility, dedicating our lives to doing good wherever we can, greeting others with justice and love. And to do so not for any benefit of our own, but simply because it is pleasing to God.

That is when we hear in our heart of hearts those heavenly words, saying, "This is my beloved, with whom I am well pleased."

We don't have to work at gaining the Lord's favor. We only have to be who God created us to be – people who are on a mission to do good in service to others for the sake of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

## PASTORAL PRAYER

Loving God, we have come together today in your name as your people, your children. It is in your name that we ask you to work in the life of each person here. We ask for your comfort and peace, life and breath, hope and joy.

We ask that you give us your strength, because we know that we are nothing without you.

God, pour out your Spirit on your people so that they will know they are never apart from you. Let your spirit of comfort and care be felt and known among those struggling this day with illness and disease, troubled hearts and troubled minds, fear of scarcity and fear of loss.

We pray your Spirit of peace and comfort for those who are grieving. And we thank you, Lord, for seeing and knowing and loving each person. We pray we experience your presence today in real and tangible ways.

We pray this in the name of Jesus the Christ, whom you sent to make your presence and power know the world over, and who taught us to be his hands and feet, and to give voice to his words, even as we pray together now, saying:

**Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.  
Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.  
Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our debts,  
as we forgive our debtors; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.  
For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.**