

Because God Said So

“Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness” Matthew 3:15.

Because I said so! This is a response that parents can resort to when their children love asking the question, why? Why do I have to do this? Why does this happen? Once the questions start, they can sure seem endless. Eventually all the whys lead parents to a moment where they can no longer give a reason for this seemingly perpetual why. Finally, in order to end the attack of the why question, the response becomes a resounding because!

Teachers during their lectures even run into this why question. As they explain the subject matter to their students. They might come across an important concept that links to the main lesson, but they know their class is not quite ready for this yet. Therefore, they assure their students that all will become clear later on, saying something to the effect, “You’ll have to trust me for now, but we’ll get to it later.”

A life of learning, from the cradle to the grave, continually faces the question, why? And this question can be answered only so many times before all the answers and reason run out. It can be a sticking point when answers and reason are lacking. And for many it is something to be avoided – an awkward moment and perhaps even more a moment of weakness. We live in a world that has been conditioned to expect and even demand a satisfactory explanation – something must silence the glaring question of why, otherwise the lack of answers is interpreted to mean something, or someone is insincere – glossing over challenging moments – and likely lying.

Well, this weekend, Matthew, in his account of Jesus’ baptism, shows us just a glimpse of how God can answer the question of why? When Jesus comes to John the Baptist to be baptized, John’s response can be summed up with the question, why? Why does Jesus need to be baptized, this doesn’t make sense to John. And Jesus doesn’t give him an immediate revelation of the reason and purpose. No blueprint was given for the master plan! Just a simple response is said, **“Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.”** (Matthew 3:15)

I think we resonate with John the Baptist in this moment. Hearing that **“Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to John, to be baptized by him”** (Matthew 3:13), seems off and out of place. Especially when we consider what happens just prior to our Gospel reading this weekend. Jesus coming onto the public scene to be baptized feels anticlimactic. Preceding our text, John the Baptist is preparing the way for the Lord, for Jesus, the One who was promised to come. And John describes the One who is to come after him as One who would baptize with fire and the Holy Spirit. One who was coming to judge! So, John’s description and our text this weekend seem like total opposites! Like John, we expect power and might, but we witness humility and meekness.

Anticipation has been building since Jesus’ humble entrance into the world, the visit of the wisemen and the slaughter of many innocent children and the suffering of those families, it seems like it’s well-past time for God to act powerfully and mightily. Yet, Jesus doesn’t enter the public stage in Jerusalem with all those in authority, in the city that housed the throne of God’s anointed and God’s temple for so many years, but at the Jordan River outside the city where to the public eye a crazy wannabe prophet was creating some entertainment for the people. Jesus’ choice of this moment and location proclaimed something new and different. Jesus hadn’t come to take earthly power and judge merely temporal troubles but to be baptized. He came to be washed in the sins of sinful people and link Himself to John’s message of repentance even though He Himself had no need to repent. He was perfect. He was the Son of God. But He also was the One who would save His people from their sins and this moment of baptism was part of His work of saving.

Yet in that moment, John must have been baffled. Here is Jesus the one for whom he was setting the stage. Jesus comes not to relieve him of his duties but join in his baptism – a baptism which John knows is inferior to what Jesus had to offer. This isn’t right! Why should the inferior, John, baptize the superior, Jesus? Certainly, it needs to be reversed! And so, John attempted to switch things around, saying, **“I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?”** (Matthew 3:14) John recognized who he was with and also knew his place. Therefore, naturally he urged Jesus to trade roles with him. It was not his place to baptize Jesus but rather the sinner needed to be baptized by the Savior.

However, Jesus replied, **“Let it be so now; for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.” Then he consented. And when Jesus was baptized, immediately he went up from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened to him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on him; and behold, a voice from heaven said, ‘This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.’”** (Matthew 3:15-17)

Even though it was not his place, Jesus reassured John that His baptism was necessary. And John heard Jesus' words, believed and listened to them. Then, what followed had to put John somewhat at ease. As Jesus rose out of the water the Trinity was revealed and Jesus' identity was confirmed. What John had been pointing to was beginning to come to fulfillment before his own eyes. While this baptism moment raised the question of why from John, because Jesus said so was enough for John to continue to listen, follow and act. Although things weren't adding up to John in that moment, Jesus' words outweighed what he thought needed to happen.

This account of our Lord's baptism is what is typically pointed to as the beginning of Christ's public ministry here on earth. However, I believe that it can also be seen as a summary of Jesus' ministry both back then and even now. Reason, anticipation and expectation build up within us this notion that we know how God should act in certain situations. We'll be reminded of this over the next several weeks as we remember numerous examples throughout Jesus' earthly life where His words and actions are misunderstood and then later on things start to make sense.

We just remembered His birth as a baby, something that does not seem right for the God of the universe – especially a birth that is tainted by a false rumor of adultery. Soon, we'll recall His temptation by Satan – a shocking moment as the Son of God submits to the same trials of His creation. His teachings will again create tension for us now even as they did when He first spoke them because He taught things that were not the norm. He called those blessed who were persecuted and provided a commentary on the law which showed that humanity had no room to get away from sin. Jesus flipped the world on its head then and even still today this reversal catches us off guard.

And, all these misunderstandings, all the questions of why culminate in the cross, where humanity's saddest expression of misunderstanding gives way to Jesus' boldest answer to the question why. From the chaos of the cross, Jesus bookends His words from His baptism, "**Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness**" (*Matthew 3:15*) with the cry, "**It is finished!**" (*John 19:30*) Then God the Father, who identified Jesus as His beloved Son at the baptism, confirms His beloved Son as the world's Savior by raising Him from the dead. So, now and forever, that empty tomb has become an affirmation that all has been fulfilled. Our perpetual why is met with God's eternal, "Because I said so!"

Dear children of God, I know that still today we are haunted with the question, why? Why am I struggling? Why doesn't someone I know believe? Why doesn't God heal me? Why do God's gifts of baptism and communion matter? Why can't Christians all believe the same thing? Why does it matter what we do in worship? Why should we listen to God? Why, why, why ... it's truly an endless refrain for our lives. And to our lives' endless refrain of why, to be told that God's answer is "because I said so," feels frustrating and tone deaf. I imagine it can make us want to give up on God and the relationship He has built with us.

But before we throw in the towel, I urge us to remember John the Baptist's response from our reading this weekend. Because Jesus said so was enough for John to continue to believe and act. What we witness in this reading, is the God, the Lord and Savior, who addresses His creature's why by being with him in the middle of that why. Jesus' "because I said so" answer to John, is more than satisfactory because He wasn't running from it. Jesus took on John's question of why not with a complete answer but with His complete presence and walked with John in this challenge. Even from prison, when John would face why he was locked up for doing God's work, Jesus pointed to His words from the prophets to encourage John that God hadn't forgotten him or His people.

Dear children of God, our Lord's answer to our whys, "because I said so," isn't like some earthly parents who are exasperated by their kids' pestering why and they just want them to stop asking. His answer flows from His great love for us as He remains present with us even when the whys overwhelm. "Because God said so," isn't designed to cut off communication with God but to encourage us to further explore what He tells us in the Bible trusting that He has given us what we need to know at this time. "Because God said so," frees us from the temptation to explain what God hasn't and to humbly confess what He shares. "Because God said so," delivers to us the tremendous assurance of His gifts of His presence, forgiveness and immortality. "Because God said so," places our trust in Him and not our wisdom, reason or understanding. May the Lord lead us to always receive His answer to our whys, "because I said so," with trust and confidence that He isn't running from our questions but rather running into them with us to assure us of His mercy, love and forgiveness. Amen.

In Christ,

Pastor Dan