

Isaiah 42: 1-9
Psalm 29
Acts 10: 34-43
Matthew 3: 13-17

IS THIS REALLY NECESSARY, JESUS?

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I have always been intrigued by the implied question in today's Gospel:

“Jesus, is this really necessary?”

There are all sorts of traditions and theories about John and Jesus.

As I suggested in a sermon just a few weeks ago,

there was a deep and abiding relationship between John and Jesus.

They were more than cousins.

They were spiritual brothers

divine children - miracle children born of faithful parents,

who had dedicated themselves - the parents and the children -

serving God and answering God's crazy will for their lives.

So John and Jesus,

+ spent time together in a desert retreat
with nothing but God and God's word to feed them?

+ that following those days, Jesus comes to his cousin,
who has preached the need for the people of God
to return to God and repent of the evil they have done?

+ that Jesus looks at John and says, “Baptize me.”

“Is this really necessary, Josh?”

(the anglicized name for Jesus, Yeshua, Joshua.)

And Jesus says quietly in John's ear,

so the gathered audience can't hear,

“Yes, John, you know it is.

“You know what Father has said.”

“But Joshua, you should baptize me, not th'other way 'round.”

“It must be this way, John, you know that.”

“Is this for us, then? Or for whom? For him? For them?”

“No, it is necessary, John, for me.

It may be necessary for Him,

but I need you to do this for me.”

Too many years ago I was presented for ordination to the priesthood.
I had two Anglo-catholic friends as my Masters of Ceremony,
 who, in our home Anglo-Catholic parish church,
 where the ceremony was to be observed,
I said as we planned, "I want everything that can be done to be so.
 I may not know or understand now, but at some time,
 it will make sense in my ministry."

So they worked with the Bishop convincing him to allow me
 to lay prostrate during the Litany of Ordination,
 offering myself totally undefensive to God's will;
to lay the hands of the weight of the Holy Spirit upon my head;
 passing upon me the Apostolic tradition of our faith;
to have my hands sealed with the oil of unction,
 so that as I visit the sick, and anoint the dying,
 these hands have been blessed.

The one thing I might should have asked was to have my lips
 touched with the searing coals of Isaiah's vision
 so that the Word of God would speak purified from my mouth.

Well, maybe not.

That may be extremely painful.

When the covenant with Abraham was sealed,
 God instructed all the men of God's people to be circumcised.
No matter their age.
And I thought burning coals to the mouth was extreme!
But as it comes to the nascent Christian community in the first century,
 Sts Paul and James argue as to whether is it necessary.
Must these Gentile Roman pagan believers in Christ
 be circumcised first into the faithful, Jewish tradition,
 as people of God
 before they are admitted to the Church of Church?

Is it necessary?

No, Paul and James finally agreed, it was not necessary.

We talk about Open Communion in the Church -

 all are welcome to receive

 whether they've been Baptized or not.

When a child - or an adult - comes up for Communion.

Yes, I give it to them.

Years ago, we made them wait for First Communion Classes.

A 4-yo came forward and said to his grandmother

 as he was to receive a blessing, "But I want Jesus, too!"

How can you deny him, with a theological debate?

Were the symbolic acts at my ordination necessary?

Probably not.

Was Jesus' baptism required, and if so, by whom?

Certainly he is the sinless one.

Though as a child, did he steal a cookie or two out of Mary's jar?

Probably not.

Was Jesus' baptism necessary for the people gathered to witness?

There is no record that they heard the voice of God
speaking from heaven.

In Matthew's telling only Jesus heard this confirmation.

It was not a public demonstration,

though other Gospels record that young Andrew witnessed
and was sent by John to follow Jesus and to call others
as we will hear next week.

Nonetheless, it was necessary for Jesus,

not to fulfill righteousness, but to fulfill his right-ness.

We know that there were others standing around,

many of whom themselves had been baptized by John.

Could it be that Jesus' Baptism by John

is to be a sign for them, an example -

Jesus wasn't going to jump to the head of the line of salvation.

But instead Jesus was to demonstrate

that he himself would follow all that was required by the Law:

"For in this way," Jesus explains to John,

"we shall do all that God requires."

I rather wonder whether

Father is pleased with Son who does what he's told!

Here, in Jesus' Baptism is the beginning of Christian Sacrament:

"An outward and visible sign,"

of something that has already taken place

"as an inward and spiritual grace."

Just like that 4-yo boy who "wanted Jesus, too,"

something has already moved within,

and now an outward action was desired.

May we too, be so moved within our souls, feeling the Spirit's presence,

to do what needs to be done.

AMEN.

CHILDREN'S SERMON

BAPTISM PROMISES

aspergelium and holy water

Do you remember when you were baptized? Some may.
I know I don't. I was only a month old.

You probably remember from other Baptisms you've witnessed,
that the family of the baby, and the whole congregation here
make promises for the child.

And there are times, like today when we celebrate Jesus' Baptism,
that we remember those promises and make them again.
And when you are confirmed, you'll be asked the same questions.

Like, Do you desire to cast off evil and renew your commitment to Jesus?
And we all answer, **I will with God's help.**
Can you say that with me? **I will with God's help.**

Let's practice.

Will you study the teaching of the apostles and in be active in fellowship, with the breaking of bread,
and in the prayers?

That's a big one isn't it?
Listen again.

Will you study what the apostles teach and be active in the fellowship of the Church, with the
breaking of bread, and in the prayers?

I will with God's help.

How about,

Will you resist evil, and when you sin, ask forgiveness?

I will with God's help.

Will you share in what you say and what you do the Good News of God in Jesus?

I will with God's help.

Will you look for Jesus in every person, and serve Christ though them, and love everyone, as
yourself, even your sister and brother?

I will with God's help.

Will you work for justice and peace for all people, and respect every human being?

I will with God's help.

Now, let's pray. Dear God, we know that as St. Paul tells us, we can do anything with you to help
us. May we every day, look to you to help us be children as you call us, so that we can hear you say,
"You are my child. I am pleased with you." AMEN.