

CONSENT

Matthew 3:13-17

Intro

Very little about the event that is contained in the opening few verses of the passage that we are about to hear makes sense. Yes, John the Baptist does baptize people and proclaim that one greater than he is coming...but the event that takes place (with John baptizing the one who was to come) leaves us as the listener confused.

Think about it: what do we think baptism does? Cleanses us from sin. Shows that we are loved by God. Shows that we are connected to a particular community.

Jesus was sinless. Jesus is God and he very much knew that he was loved by God. Jesus doesn't come to join a community, he comes to gather people to himself.

So why baptism?

Jesus speaks to how this baptism fulfills all the ways of righteousness (which I hear as a nice way of saying, 'the prophets said it would happen this way, so we're going to do it this way').

But then there are the next three words.

These three words speak very much to the sort of faith that Jesus longs for us to have in him...and it starts to manifest itself prior to his ministry beginning. The scripture reads this way.

Matthew 3:13-17

13 Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan, to be baptized by him. ¹⁴John would have prevented him, saying, 'I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?' ¹⁵But Jesus answered him, 'Let it be so now; for it is proper for us in this way to fulfil all righteousness.' Then he consented. ¹⁶And 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. ¹⁷And a voice from heaven said, 'This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased.'

Acts 10:34-43

Intro

So did you pick up on the three words that I was speaking to?

Our second passage takes those words in a bit of a different direction as we hear Peter describing how God works and how God works through he and his fellow disciples.

The describer that is included is that the disciples were commanded to proclaim the truths of God and Jesus. And that is true ('Go therefore and make disciples of all nations').

But there still needs to be a turning over of control that takes place. As was mentioned in the first passage, consent.

As you think about your journey with God, who's in control? Who should be? The scripture reads this way.

Acts 10:34-43

34 Then Peter began to speak to them: 'I truly understand that God shows no partiality, ³⁵but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him. ³⁶You know the message he sent to the people of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ—he is Lord of all. ³⁷That message spread throughout Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John announced: ³⁸how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power; how he went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him. ³⁹We are witnesses to all that he did both in Judea and in Jerusalem. They put him to death by hanging him on a tree; ⁴⁰but God raised him on the third day and allowed him to appear, ⁴¹not to all the people but to us who were chosen by God as witnesses, and who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. ⁴²He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one ordained by God as judge of the living and the dead. ⁴³All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.'

'Consent'

Anyone who lives in our current cultural configuration of the United States has a basic understanding of consent. It shows up everywhere.

Do you want to get your car worked on? You'll need to provide your consent.

Do you want you or your child to become a student at a school? You'll need to provide your consent.

Do you want your child to go on a field trip to...anywhere, the farm, the store, the museum? You'll need to provide your consent.

Do you want your team to be able to play on a township ballfield? You'll need to provide your consent.

Do you want to receive medical treatment to remove that really annoying hangnail that has been there for the last three days? You'll need to provide your consent.

Even the basic understanding of relating to one another, from implied consent, to expressed consent, to informed consent and to unanimous consent, all lean upon an appreciation of that understanding.

So what does that word mean to us (especially considering the sorts of examples that I have placed before you)?

On its surface there is the definition: one person voluntarily agreeing to the proposal or the desires of another.

But underneath that definition is the connotation, the feeling that you are turning over control...to someone else. Yes, there are certainly occasions when we may have a choice in the matter (after all,

there are a whole lot of doctors and mechanics out there), but eventually we run out of choices and we have to provide our...consent. It leaves us feeling like we don't have control which is something that large swaths of our culture do not resonate with all that well (the Presidential election anyone?).

That's why the passages that we hear from this morning cause us to have mixed feelings.

On the one hand, we are thankful for the rolls that John the Baptist and Peter played (and continue to play even today) in the ministry of Jesus Christ.

The baptism of Jesus provides us with another moment of confirmation that yes, 'this is the One whom we have been waiting for' as the Holy Spirit descends like a dove and the voice echoes down from the skies.

And the fact that Peter has assumed the leadership responsibility of carrying forward the message (and ministry) of Jesus is, at least in part, the reason that we are here at all.

Again, we're grateful for that; grateful for the ways that they were able to consent to the leadership of Jesus in their lives so that our lives might be positively affected.

It's when the whole reality of consent begins to migrate back to the one who is reading and hearing the passage, that we start to get a little twitchy.

For here's the thing: these passages are not intended to merely be news stories of events that happened so long ago. Yes, they do serve that purpose, but that is not their goal.

Their goal is to allow the Spirit of God to speak through them to lead all those who hear them (you know, us) that the illustrative example that is set are steps that each of us will need to follow in one way and another.

Do we become John the Baptist or Peter? Absolutely not!

But their example, of being willing and able to consent so that the Kingdom of God might be championed, and built in some way (any way), shows us that God is in control and that we are the hands and feet through which that authority is able to be felt in a myriad of ways.

But are we willing to consent to the guidance of a Spirit of God? Are we willing to relinquish whatever perceived control we feel that we might have so that our words and actions might become the actions that we are able to applaud in others?

Are we willing to sign over that authority?

For example, if I stepped out of the pulpit and handed you a 'Walking with Christ' consent form, would you sign it? Would you turn over control of your life trusting that the God whom we profess to worship has not only our best interests at heart, but also the best interests of everyone else out there? Would you sign it?

Or would you only sign it if the stipulations that you had were met? Only so much time will be provided? Only so many talents and resources are able to be used? You are only able to 'Walk with Christ' in areas that you pre-approve?

In certain ways, both John the Baptist and Peter had those moments. We've talked about how both of them had moments when they questioned, when they doubted, when they started to say and do things that were not in line with how God was moving in the world.

Peter denied Christ three times and waffled back and forth on whether the early Christian community needed to follow the kosher laws. John the Baptist asked from his prison cell, 'are you the one or are we to wait for another?'

Sounds like moments of stipulated consent.

And yet do we doubt that they were faithful followers of Jesus? Absolutely not! Because they ultimately recognized that their stipulations were about them or the people that they knew and were connected to. They recognized that they could provide complete consent...and be satisfied, having faith that they were, and always would be, cared for by the Creator of all.

Are we?

Are we willing to drive through our community, recognize that there is some sort of a need, and take the step of trying to meet that need, because we can feel that tug from within? Are we willing to consent to the authority of God?

Are we willing to hear a need expressed in the midst of these walls, or the walls of our office, or other organization that you are a part of and find out how we might be of service, because we have faith that God will provide us everything that we may need to begin to speak to that need? Are we willing to consent to the authority of God?

Are you willing to pray for, on a daily basis, this church so that we might be able to discern what 'the what' of our ministry should be so that we are able to articulate a vision that allows us as a community of faith to step forward in directed service to the one whom we know as Messiah? Are you willing to consent to the authority of God?

We give consent all the time and many of those times we do it in a way that is begrudging or qualified.

God is seeking for us to provide a full and complete consent to His guidance on a daily basis. Will we?

If you are ready, sign your name. If you need to do it literally and leave it hanging in a conspicuous place, then do it!

Will you (insert name here) trust in my authority...no matter what? Sign Here.

We are the hands and feet of God; we are His voice and His heart...and He needs our consent. Will we provide it?

After Sermon Prayer

You seek our consent...and we hedge. In so many ways, we try and find some wiggle room. Lord, help us to trust You, to have faith in You, to consent to You so that we might be able to ever more fully allow Your name to be praised and Your kingdom to be built. Lord, let it be so. Amen.