

Matthew 3:13-17
January 9, '11

“ARGUING WITH JESUS”

I THINK IT'S SAFE TO SAY THAT VERY FEW OF US ENJOY ARGUING.

I KNOW THERE ARE EXCEPTIONS.

I'VE MET THEM & I'M SURE YOU HAVE AS WELL, BUT FOR THE MOST PART, VERY FEW OF US LOOK FORWARD TO AN ARGUMENT.

WE DON'T WAKE UP THINKING, *“I HOPE I GET INTO A BIG ARGUMENT WITH SOMEONE TODAY!”*

THERE ARE ALSO CERTAIN INDIVIDUALS WITH WHOM ONE IS WELL-ADVISED TO AVOID AN ARGUMENT.

ARGUING WITH THE BOSS USUALLY ISN'T A GOOD IDEA & IT'S NEVER, EVER GOOD TO ARGUE WITH YOUR BARBER OR BEAUTICIAN OR YOUR DENTIST – ESPECIALLY WHEN YOUR SITTING IN THEIR CHAIR!

ARGUING WITH SOME PEOPLE IS JUST NOT A GOOD IDEA!

IN ALL OF HUMAN HISTORY, WOULDN'T YOU THINK JESUS WOULD BE AT THE VERY TOP OF THE LIST OF INDIVIDUALS WITH WHOM ONE SHOULD MOST VIGOROUSLY AVOID AN ARGUMENT?!

IT JUST DOESN'T SEEM TO MAKE A LOT OF SENSE!

HE'S THE “KING OF KINGS” & “LORD OF LORDS” FOR CRYING OUT LOUD!

AND YET THAT IS PRECISELY WHAT WE HAVE IN THIS PASSAGE IN MATTHEW'S GOSPEL.

JOHN THE BAPTIST HAS AN ARGUMENT WITH JESUS!

AMAZINGLY, THOUGH, HE'S NOT THE ONLY ONE.

THERE WERE OBVIOUSLY HIS ARGUMENTS WITH THE RELIGIOUS LEADERS – THE PHARISEES & SCRIBES.

BUT THINK OF THE ARGUMENTS JESUS HAD WITH HIS OWN FOLLOWERS.

“WHAT DO YOU MEAN ‘FEED THE PEOPLE?!’ WE DON'T HAVE ENOUGH FOOD FOR ALL OF THEM!”

“THIS PERFUME COULD HAVE BEEN SOLD FOR A HEFTY SUM & THE MONEY GIVEN TO THE POOR.”

“JESUS, YOU'LL NEVER WASH MY FEET!”

“COME ON, JESUS. LET'S STAY HERE ON THIS MOUNTAIN & BUILD BOOTHS FOR YOU & MOSES & ELIJAH.”

“WHAT DO YOU MEAN, ‘PUT OUR NETS ON THE OTHER SIDE?’ WE'VE BEEN FISHING ALL NIGHT!”

SO, YOU SEE. THIS PASSAGE MAY BE THE FIRST INSTANCE, BUT HARDLY THE ONLY TIME JESUS' FOLLOWERS CHOSE TO ARGUE WITH HIM.

IN THIS CASE, AND I IMAGINE THE OTHERS AS WELL, IT WASN'T SIMPLY A MATTER OF ONE COMMENT BEING MADE & JESUS RESPONDING WITH SOMETHING THAT SEALED THE DEAL.

THE WORD THAT IS USED HERE IS INTERESTING.

IT SUGGESTS SOMETHING THAT'S ONGOING.

IT'S MORE THAN SIMPLY JOHN SAYING “I SHOULDN'T BE BAPTIZING YOU! YOU SHOULD BE BAPTIZING ME!”

IT'S MORE LIKE AN EXTENDED CONVERSATION OR EXCHANGE.

SIMPLY PUT, IT'S AN ARGUMENT THAT JOHN THE BAPTIST HAS WITH JESUS.

IT'S ALMOST LIKE THAT SONG FROM "ANNIE GET YOUR GUN."

"JOHN, I WANT YOU TO BAPTIZE ME."

"LORD, I CAN'T DO THAT."

"YES, YOU CAN."

"NO, I CAN'T."

"YES, YOU CAN."

"NO, I CAN'T."

"YES, YOU CAN."

WHEN YOU THINK ABOUT IT, THOUGH, WOULDN'T YOU HAVE A TENDENCY TO SIDE WITH JOHN IN THE ARGUMENT?

WHY IN THE WORLD DID JESUS NEED TO BE BAPTIZED?!

HE WAS SINLESS & MATTHEW TOLD US, JUST A FEW VERSES EARLIER, THAT THE PEOPLE COMING TO JOHN, AS HE SAYS, "WERE BAPTIZED BY HIM IN THE RIVER JORDAN, CONFESSING THEIR SINS."

SO WHY DID THE ONLY SINLESS PERSON IN THE WORLD INSIST ON BEING BAPTIZED?

THERE IS A FANCIFUL EXPLANATION OFFERED BY "THE GOSPEL OF THE HEBREWS" - A BOOK WRITTEN IN THE SECOND CENTURY THAT DIDN'T MAKE IT INTO THE BIBLE.

IT SUGGESTS THAT JESUS DIDN'T REALLY WANT TO BE BAPTIZED BUT ONLY DID SO TO PLEASE HIS MOTHER & THE REST OF HIS FAMILY.

IT SAYS, "THE MOTHER OF THE LORD AND HIS BROTHERS SAID TO HIM, 'JOHN THE BAPTIST BAPTIZES FOR THE FORGIVENESS OF SINS; LET US GO AND BE BAPTIZED BY HIM.'

BUT HE SAID TO THEM, 'IN WHAT WAY HAVE I SINNED THAT I SHOULD GO AND BE BAPTIZED BY HIM? UNLESS, PERHAPS, WHAT I HAVE JUST SAID IS A SIN OF IGNORANCE.'"

I DON'T THINK THAT'S WHY JESUS WAS BAPTIZED.

I THINK, IN BEING BAPTIZED, JESUS ALIGNED HIMSELF WITH US.

HE STOOD SHOULDER TO SHOULDER WITH YOU & WITH ME.

IN THAT MOMENT, JESUS TOOK HIS PLACE ALONGSIDE A TROUBLED WORLD.

HE ALIGNED HIMSELF WITH THE FAULTS & FAILURES, PAINS & PROBLEMS, OF ALL THE BROKEN & HURTING PEOPLE WHO HAD FLOCKED TO THE JORDAN RIVER.

BY WADING INTO THOSE MUDDY WATERS, HE TOOK HIS PLACE BESIDE THEM ALL.

IN HIS BAPTISM, JESUS DECLARED TO ALL THE WORLD & TO ALL GENERATIONS THAT HE STANDS BY YOUR SIDE IN ALL YOUR STRUGGLES IN LIFE.

HE'S THERE WITH YOU IN YOUR PAIN & IN YOUR SORROW.

IN SINKING DOWN INTO THAT WATER, HE ASSURES YOU THAT HE WILL GO TO THE VERY DEPTHS WITH YOU.

WHEN YOU FEEL LIKE YOU'RE DROWNING IN THE TURBULENT WATERS OF LIFE, JESUS IS THERE AT YOUR SIDE.

I THINK THAT'S ONE REASON JESUS DESIRED TO BE BAPTIZED BY JOHN.

IT'S AN ASSURANCE THAT JESUS WILL NEVER ASK US TO GO SOMEWHERE HE HASN'T GONE HIMSELF.

JESUS OFFERS ANOTHER REASON FOR THE NECESSITY OF HIS BAPTISM WHEN HE SAYS, "...*IN THIS WAY TO FULFILL ALL RIGHTEOUSNESS.*"

NOW THAT'S A STRANGE STATEMENT, ISN'T IT?

I THINK OTHER TRANSLATIONS ARE HELPFUL HERE.

OTHERS TRANSLATE IT AS "...*TO DO ALL THAT GOD REQUIRES*" OR "...*WE MUST DO ALL THAT GOD WANTS US TO DO.*"

THAT WORD "RIGHTEOUSNESS" RAISES AN INTERESTING ISSUE FOR US.

WE SOMETIMES THINK WE KNOW THE RIGHT THING TO DO, BUT THAT'S NOT ALWAYS WHAT GOD HAS IN MIND.

GO BACK JUST TWO CHAPTERS IN MATTHEW'S GOSPEL & WE FIND JOSEPH BEING DESCRIBED AS A "RIGHTEOUS" MAN.

BECAUSE OF HIS RIGHTEOUSNESS, HE PLANNED TO DIVORCE MARY QUIETLY, SO AS NOT TO EXPOSE HER TO PUBLIC DISGRACE.

JOSEPH THOUGHT IN DOING THAT, HE WAS DOING THE "RIGHTEOUS" THING, BUT GOD HAD OTHER PLANS IN MIND AS THE ANGEL TOLD HIM.

SIMILARLY, WITH JOHN THE BAPTIST, HE FELT THE "RIGHTEOUS" THING TO DO WOULD BE FOR *HIM* TO BE BAPTIZED BY JESUS, RATHER THAN THE OTHER WAY AROUND.

BUT GOD HAD OTHER PLANS.

THE GREAT THEOLOGIAN JOSEPH SITTLER TOLD A STORY ABOUT AN EXPERIENCE HE HAD IN JERUSALEM.

HIS CAR BROKE DOWN & HE TOOK IT TO A MECHANIC TO HAVE IT FIXED.

WHEN THE MECHANIC HAD FINISHED & STARTED UP THE ENGINE & HEARD IT RUNNING PERFECTLY, HE SAID, "ZADIK."

ZADIK IS THE HEBREW WORD TRANSLATED AS "*RIGHTEOUSNESS.*"

WHAT HE MEANT WAS "*IT WORKS.*"

IN HIS BAPTISM BY JOHN, THE WORLD IS UNITED WITH GOD & "*IT WORKS.*"

THERE IS ONE MORE VITALLY IMPORTANT ASPECT OF THIS PASSAGE THAT I THINK NEEDS TO BE ADDRESSED.

I THINK, QUITE OFTEN WHEN WE LOOK AT THE BAPTISM OF JESUS – AN EVENT, BY THE WAY, THAT IS ONE OF THE ONLY EVENTS IN THE MINISTRY OF JESUS THAT IS RECORDED BY ALL 4 GOSPELS – WE USUALLY FOCUS ON THE FINAL VERSES.

WE TEND TO DIRECT OUR ATTENTION TO THE DOVE DESCENDING FROM THE SKY & THE WORDS OF AFFIRMATION FROM GOD.

BUT THIS MIDDLE SECTION OF THE PASSAGE – THE VERSES WE’VE BEEN FOCUSING ON THIS MORNING – INCLUDE AN INCREDIBLY IMPORTANT WORD.

OVER THE PAST FEW WEEKS, WE’VE LOOKED AT LITTLE WORDS THAT MAKE A BIG DIFFERENCE.

ON THE SUNDAY BEFORE CHRISTMAS, WE LOOKED AT 4 LITTLE WORDS – “*THEY GAVE HIM GIFTS.*”

ON CHRISTMAS EVE, WE LOOKED AT FOUR MORE LITTLE WORDS – “*FOR ALL THE PEOPLE.*”

TODAY, I WANT TO DIRECT YOUR ATTENTION TO JUST ONE LITTLE WORD – A WORD THAT CARRIES MIND-NUMBING IMPLICATIONS.

IN THE STATEMENT OF JESUS THAT WE’VE ALREADY EXAMINED, HE SAYS, “*LET IT BE SO NOW; FOR IT IS PROPER FOR US IN THIS WAY TO FULFILL ALL RIGHTEOUSNESS.*”

CONSIDER THAT LITTLE 2-LETTER WORD “US.”

JESUS IS SAYING, “*JOHN, TO FULFILL GOD’S PLAN – TO MAKE IT WORK – IT’S GOING TO TAKE BOTH OF US. IT’S THE TWO OF US WORKING TOGETHER ON THIS.*”

THE IMPLICATIONS OF SUCH A STATEMENT ARE STAGGERING!

BUT, YOU KNOW, IT’S NOT UNIQUE IN THE MINISTRY OF JESUS.

THIS WASN’T THE FIRST, NOR WOULD IT BE THE LAST TIME, JESUS NEEDED HELP FROM SOMEONE ELSE.

HE NEEDED MARY’S WILLINGNESS TO BRING HIM INTO THE WORLD.

HE NEEDED JOSEPH’S COURAGE TO PROTECT HIM FROM HEROD.

HE NEEDED A LITTLE BOY’S LUNCH TO FEED A MULTITUDE.

HE NEEDED SIMON OF CYRENE TO SHOULDER THE BURDEN OF HIS CROSS.

HE NEEDED JOSEPH OF ARIMATHEA TO OFFER A TOMB FOR HIS BURIAL.

FROM BEGINNING TO END, JESUS NEEDED OTHERS.

JESUS NEEDED JOHN THE BAPTIST AND, MAKE NO MISTAKE ABOUT IT, JESUS NEEDS YOU.

HE NEEDS YOU TO HELP HIM “FULFILL ALL RIGHTEOUSNESS.”

HE NEEDS YOU TO “MAKE IT WORK.”

HE NEEDS YOU TO STAND BY HIS SIDE AS HE STANDS BY YOURS.

THERE’S NOTHING THAT SAYS YOU CAN’T ARGUE WITH HIM ABOUT IT.

HE’S CLEARLY ACCUSTOMED TO THAT.

BUT, IN THE END, KNOW THAT GOD HAS A PLAN FOR YOU & THAT PLAN IS TO – ALONGSIDE JESUS – “FULFILL ALL RIGHTEOUSNESS.”

YOU STAND – LIKE JOHN - IN YOUR OWN JORDAN RIVER.

YOU STAND WITH A ROLE TO PLAY, A TASK TO ACCOMPLISH, A MINISTRY TO OFFER.

YOU DON’T STAND THERE ALONE, THOUGH.

JESUS IS THERE AT YOUR SIDE.

HE SAYS, “*IT’S PROPER FOR US TO DO THIS THING TOGETHER.*”

MAKE NO MISTAKE ABOUT IT – JESUS NEEDS YOU.

AND, OF THAT, THERE CAN BE NO ARGUMENT. AMEN.

*The Reverend Dr. Dennis R. Davenport
Eastminster Presbyterian Church
Evansville, Indiana*