

## “Consenting to Christ”

Pastor Dave Carlson  
First Presbyterian Church  
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**New Testament Lesson: Deuteronomy 7:7-9**  
**Old Testament Lesson: Matthew 3:11-17**

A woman had recently been baptized. One of her coworkers asked her what it was like to be a Christian. She was caught off guard and didn't know how to answer; but then she looked up, saw a jack-o'-lantern on the desk, and said, "It's like being a pumpkin." The coworker asked her to explain that one. "Well," she said, "God picks you from the patch and brings you in and washes off all the dirt on the outside that you got from being around all the other pumpkins. Then he ... takes all the yucky stuff out from inside. He removes all those seeds of doubt, hate, greed and all that. Then he carves you a new smiling face and puts his light inside of you to shine for all to see. It is our choice to either stay outside and rot on the vine or come inside and be something new and bright."<sup>1</sup>

In living out our baptism, it's our choice whether to accept our new lives as disciples of Jesus, or to stick with our old ways of being. The hardest part about it is, in Jesus, our lives are new everyday and so our challenges as faithful disciples are new everyday – as parents and children, as coworkers and students, as people facing the struggles of aging, the pressures of being a teenager or pre-teen, the uncertainties of picking a career and navigating the workforce.

It's not always easy to see the light of our faith shining into the darkness and uncertainty of this world. Why is it so hard for us to see the light of Jesus in our world today? One day long ago there was a man named John who stood in the waters of the Jordan River in Judea. He watched as the light of the world came towards him, in the presence of Jesus. Jesus wants to be baptized by John. But Matthew tells us, "John would have prevented him, saying, 'I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?'"

John the baptizer sees Jesus and questions his presence in his life. With Jesus in his life, John has to rethink who he is all of a sudden, who he's supposed to be, what Jesus wants from him. Before encountering Jesus, John had it all figured out. "I baptize you with water for repentance," says John, "but one who is more powerful than I is coming after me.... He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing-fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing-floor and will gather his wheat into the granary; but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire."

<sup>1</sup> As told by Mike Nelson, Triune Lutheran Parish, Cokato, Minnesota.

Does that sound like the Jesus you know? Not really, because the Jesus we know, the Jesus seen in the gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John is forgiving and accepting, he doesn't fight back, but rather he serves God's will even at the cost of his own life.

So if we have trouble seeing the light of our faith shining in the darkest moments of our lives, perhaps it's because, like John, we are expecting a different Jesus than the one God sends to us.

Everyday we face struggles that we think ought to be wiped out, overcome; we don't deserve it. Or we think we've got it all figured out and if we just exert more effort, be little bit smarter, more handsome or beautiful, have more money or wield more power, life will go our way.

But the more time we spend on this earth, living into our baptism in Christ, the more we learn that's not how it works. So the question for us is, do we accept who Jesus wants us to be or are we set on being something different, stuck on our own expectations of life regardless of where they lead us.

That's what we're focusing on in the months to come – what it is to be a disciple of Jesus on his terms, and not on our own. If we open ourselves up to the teachings of Jesus, we will approach life differently. Our whole way of looking at the world and our place in it, our entire mindset will change, and the joy of Christ will be more available to us.

A father was in church with three of his young children, including his 5-year-old daughter. During the service, the pastor was baptizing a tiny infant. The 5-year-old was really taken by this, hearing the pastor say special words and watching him pour water over the infant's head. Puzzled, she looked up at her father. "Daddy," she said, "why is the man brainwashing that baby?"

Our baptism in Christ is kind of like brainwashing. Not in the negative sense, but in the sense that if our way of thinking about things doesn't change, then we're not truly being disciples of Jesus. How open are you to pausing in your daily life to consider if your faith would change your response to a given situation? How often do we do that? Just let it be, and reflect on Jesus, on our faith?

Three of the most profound words that Jesus ever uttered he uttered when John the baptizer wanted to do things his own way despite what Jesus was saying to him. "John would have prevented him," says Matthew, but Jesus says to him, John, "let it be."

In the words of Jesus Christ – not Paul McCarthy – let it be. When you're tempted to forces your will in a situation, let it be. When someone disrespects you or belittles you, don't lash out, let it be. When you're hurt or scared or feeling

threatened – as long as it's just feelings – let it be. Feel the feelings, let go of the hurt, allow God to handle the situation.

“Let it be so now,” says Jesus; “for it is proper for us in this way to fulfill all righteousness.” In other words, it's not about what you or I think is right, but rather it's about us fulfilling God's will.

Jesus, in humbling himself in the baptism of John and in the eyes of the world, Jesus is elevated by God as the embodiment of divine will, the perfect life, full of righteousness.

Our job as disciples of Jesus is not to live a perfect life according to our way of thinking, but rather to live according to our new identity as children of God who have been baptized in Christ.

Everyday, we get submerged in the waters of baptism, as the worries of the world wash over us, or sweep us away, or drown our hopes and dreams. And everyday, Christ raises us up out of the water and invites us to look at the world a little differently, a little bit more like Jesus saw things.

Next week we will look at what Jesus taught about justice. Jesus' ideas of justice are not our ideas of justice. Just as Jesus' approach to life is not how we would naturally approach life, apart from Christ.

Being a follower of Christ is not about what we're striving to achieve in this world. It's about what God is working to achieve in us, and through us. John struggled to accept Jesus' instruction to baptize him, but knowing that Jesus was from God, he consented. And that's when the heavens were opened to him and God's voice was made known to him.

Consenting to Christ – it's what gives us a glimpse of heaven right here on earth, through faithful discipleship. Consenting to Christ is what opens the word of God to us through scripture, that we might grow as disciples of Jesus.

I invite you this week to look for places in your life to consent to Christ. Let's set aside our knee-jerk way of responding to life, and instead, respond as a follower of Jesus. And to do that, let's take a moment, when life isn't going our way, just to let it be and to let God guide our response. Amen.

## PASTORAL PRAYER

Holy God, we enter your presence with praise, for all majesty and glory belong to you. You sit enthroned as Lord over all.

Yet you entered this world as one of us, walking and working, praying and preaching, healing and harvesting, forgiving and feeding.

Your baptism reminds us that we share in your ministry, in your suffering and death, and in your resurrection and new life.

We are awed by the privilege of being called your disciples. We are challenged to continue the good work you began. We are grateful for the Spirit who empowers us to follow you.

Lord, we pray for those who are gripped by the violence of this world, from Ferguson, MO, to New York City, from Paris to the Middle East.

Send your Spirit of peace among your people, O God, that we might live according to your will.

We pray for those closer to home experiencing all manner of struggles – whether financial or health, in the workplace, school, or home-life.

Guide them – and us – toward a place of wholeness, happiness, and prosperity.

For it is your son who shows us the way of discipleship that leads us to you, raising us up above the struggles of this world to the joy you have prepared for us.

We pray all this in his name, as he taught us, 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.**