**To Do Things the Right Way**

Based on [Matthew 3:13-17](https://biblia.com/books/esv/Mt3.13-17)

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The Baptism of Our Lord ~

(The First Sunday after Epiphany)

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Today we will consider the Baptism of Jesus with reference to the theme of the Christian Virtue of patience.

Jesus comes to John to be baptized. John’s baptism was a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. Jesus is sinless, and so John didn’t see the point in baptizing Jesus. Jesus responds: “Let it be so now, for it is necessary to fulfill all righteousness.”

Lots of speculation has gone into the meaning of Jesus words here. Lots of ink spilt and commentaries written on it. But the simplest, most literal interpretation is always the best. Simply put, Jesus is saying, baptize me anyway, because it is important to do things the right way.

What is the “right way?” The right way to drive a nail is to use a hammer. The right way to sand a board is with the grain. The right way is often assumed to mean the way that is the efficient way. And in many things that’s the case. Should you use a nail or a screw to bind those two boards together? Well there is no right or wrong answer; it depends on what resources you have and your goal. It’s a simple matter of which one will best get the job done, with the least effort, the least waste.

When John the Baptist says “I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?”, you might think he’s just being humble. But there’s another sense to it as well. There’s a sense in which John is saying “Why are we wasting time bapting you--someone who doesn’t need it--when you could be baptizing someone who does.” Let’s skip baptising you and you just get on with saving me. Let’s not waste any unnecessary time or energy. That’s the real goal anyway.

That’s not unlike the disciples, when they rebuke a woman for anointing Jesus’ for burial with expensive perfume. They say…”our job is to take care of and befriend the poor, and we can help do that with money. Why is this woman wasting this perfume on Jesus, who doesn’t stink anyway?” But Jesus says that she did a good thing, even if it wasn’t, in their eyes.

Jesus teaching that “It is necessary to fulfill all righteousness” is a great reminder to us all that God’s ways are not necessarily our ways. And in many ways God uses what is foolish in the world to shame the wise, and what is despised in the world to shame the strong. God uses what is inefficient in our eyes in order to frustrate and shame our impatience and lust for what we want done.

One of the reasons that some people refuse to believe in God, or that God is good, is because of this idea that what is efficient is always best. And what is not efficient is wasteful. What I mean is that, to be efficient you must accomplish your goals as quickly and easily as possible with the resources you have available. And if you don’t, you are not efficient, and if you are not efficient, you're not good at your job.

God has infinite resources to rid the world of evil, and yet it has taken him, so far, 6000 years and still hasn’t done it. Some people try to defend God for not fixing the world right now by saying “He’s doing the best with what he has to work with...Life gives him lemons, he makes lemonade.” But God needs no justification for the way he does things. After all God spoke the universe into existence, but he took his time...six days to do what he could have created complete. Why does God take his time? It doesn’t make sense to the way we do things. But God’s ways are mysterious, and that often means that he does things that we don’t see the point. We are simply to accept that God’s ways are not our ways. “Be still, and know that I am God”.

So the verdict of the faithless is that God is inefficient. He could work faster to rid the world of evil, but he doesn’t and that is inexcusable. If it’s not that he can’t do it quicker, then it must be that he won’t. And if he won’t then he’s inefficient, and inefficiency is carelessness, and carelessness is unloving, and unloving is evil. This is why we need to be careful that, in our impatience, we don’t turn our faith to the false God of efficiency.

When the Israelites were waiting for Moses to come down from the mountain with help from God, they got impatient. We don’t know what’s become of this Moses. This isn’t working fast enough for us, and we’re in real danger. Aaron, make us a golden calf to worship. We hear that graven image gods help us achieve our goals faster than Jehovah. And we want to get out of the wilderness and into the promised land asap. And who knows, for all they knew the golden calf was an efficient way to get them to the promised land, but it wasn’t the right way. Waiting for god’s servant Moses to return was the right way to fulfill all righteousness before entering the promised land.

And John the Baptist didn’t think it was the best use of his or Jesus’ time and resources to baptize him. But Jesus’ simple response is that it’s the right thing to do...not because it makes sense to you right now, but because it is the way God has ordained it to be over against your willingness or ability to understand. Trust the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding.

God’s ways are not our ways, and his purpose in Baptizing his son was not ineffective or useless or a time wasting ceremony. It is a further revelation that Jesus is uniting with us in our salvation. He joins us in our baptism because he too was baptized into the same salvation. He was baptized before us to show that we will share the same baptism, just as he was resurrected before us so that through him we may share in the same resurrection. God has a plan, and though he could accomplish his goals more efficiently in an instant...he doesn’t, and yet he is still right, and good, and holy for delaying his own gratification and ours. He doesn’t need any resources to give us grace, still he uses the most commonly available resource on the planet...water, in order to deliver his promise of forgiveness life and salvation through his Son to all who believe.