

Trinity: The Culmination of a Good Plan
Sermon 5-7-17
Pastor Curtis Dehmey

Matthew 3:13-17

¹³Then 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 fulfill 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."

Message:

(Play Video at <http://www.sermonspice.com/product/61513/john-the-baptist>)

If you recall from last week, we focused on Mary's willingness to respond "yes" to God's call to carry Jesus to birth. She may not have wanted it. She may not have planned for it, but she said "yes." Mary was a willing servant of God. This week, we fast forward to another act of servanthood. One of the interesting things about the gospels is that we don't see much narrative from the time Jesus is born to the time Jesus begins his ministry here in this passage. The only story we have in the gospels, in Luke, is when Jesus remains in the temple as his parents left and Mary and Joseph didn't realize that they left Jesus behind. So it's hard to say if Jesus knew that he was the Son of God all along or if he simply discovered that truth at the time of his baptism. If you want to read some bizarre stories of Jesus' childhood the Gospel of Thomas has some stories. But that's also part of the reason the Gospel of Thomas wasn't put into the Bible when it was formed. So we don't see much development of Jesus. In Matthew's Gospel, Jesus is born, the wise men visit, they flee to Egypt in fear of Herod's infant massacre and then return to Egypt. Then the text fast-forwards to John the Baptist preaching and baptizing the people. And then we land at our text.

John the Baptist has this calling to baptize people. Realize that there is no baptism practice in the Old Testament. It somehow appears in the New Testament as if it were already commonly practiced. The practice is believed to first be developed by the Essene community of Jews. And John the Baptist acquired this practice for his ministry. The practice was usually used for cleansing purposes. We see this in 3:5-6, "Then the people of Jerusalem and all Judea were going out

to him, and all the region along the Jordan, and they were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins.” So John the Baptist recognizes this value of confessing one’s sins and the need for a fresh start. But this may confuse matters as we look at the baptism of Jesus. Does Jesus get baptized to be cleansed of sin? If he is God incarnate, isn’t he sinless?

Well...if we think about baptism as a marker of a fresh start. Or a point of reference to say that this is the beginning or a starting point. Maybe Jesus getting baptized is a marker of his beginning in ministry. Like I said, we don’t see any ministry being done before this point by Jesus. And so his baptism marks this beginning. For in verse 15 Jesus says, “it is proper for us in this way to fulfill all righteousness.” Jesus seems to understand to some extent that this is what was meant to happen. It’s like having this grand broad plan, but not knowing when it is going to begin until you see it and know it. You may be watchful and mindful of when something may begin, but you don’t know exactly when until you see it. Jesus saw John the Baptist’s actions and knew that this was the time for this to occur.

John the Baptist knew that this was going to happen at some point too. Beginning in 3:11, John says, “¹¹“I baptize you with water for repentance, but one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to carry his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. ¹²His 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.” John understands that his role is to clear the way for Jesus. To serve Jesus in that way.

Now, if Jesus is God incarnate, the son of God, wouldn’t he, in theory, be more powerful and holy than John the Baptist? Yes. So then shouldn’t he be the one baptizing himself and John the Baptist? Probably. But here is the beautiful thing about Jesus’ story, ministry and journey. He doesn’t have to do any of this. He doesn’t have to take away our sins. He doesn’t have to show us how to live a life after God. God could just simply stay up in heaven and watch humanity fall apart. But Jesus belittles himself. He chooses to be a servant of John and all of humanity when he doesn’t have to. Why? Because it fulfills the plan that the Trinity laid out. It marks the beginning of Jesus’ ministry. Verses 14 and 15, “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 fulfill all righteousness.’ Then he consented.” While it may have been more in order for Jesus to baptize John, Jesus knew that it was better to belittle himself before John. Even someone who may be unworthy. Because by subjecting himself to John he was fulfilling all righteousness. It was bringing the plan into reality.

Can you imagine for hundreds of years knowing that God was going to bring someone who was going to save Israel? Some great King? Can you imagine the pain of waiting? I got to tell you, waiting for a plan to take shape and become a reality is incredibly painful. You want it right now. You don't want to wait. You want relief from whatever is going on in the moment. You want the plan to happen now. But then on the flipside that long-range planning. That forever painful waiting also creates anticipation. And when that plan comes together it is glorious. It brings incredible and ineffable fulfillment. All the turmoil, planning and anguish doesn't carry the same weight because you see that what you've planned has become a reality. While I know Christine loved wedding planning, I hated it. It was painful at times. All the relational issues we had to confront with family. And the communication and details. It was all a headache. But, when the plan came together on that wedding day, it was beautiful. It brought joy beyond belief. All the bumps and hurdles along the way seemed inconsequential because the great plan came together.

For as many times as I've had good plans come together, I've also had good plans fail. This happened all too often as a youth pastor. As you may know, being a youth pastor requires a lot of programming and planning. A lot of juggling details. To the point where I think I've had my fill for a lifetime. One of those plans were coming up with lessons for Sunday School. God bless Lori for her work with our youth. Be sure to thank her for all that she invests. Because I can't tell you how many times I thought I had the best Bible Study planned for the youth and it bombed. I had activities. I had videos. I had powerpoint presentations. I had pop-culture embedded into the Bible Study. I had great questions that would get them thinking and discussing. But there are a couple of things you can't plan for. You don't know who is going to be in attendance. So you don't know if your more talkative youth are going to be there. You don't know if those trouble-makers are going to be present. You also can't plan for their energy level. From my experience, 9 times out of 10, youth didn't have any energy on a Sunday morning. It looked like they just rolled out of bed and were dragged to church most of the time. And you also can't plan for chemistry among the youth. So if some youth don't feel comfortable to speak, you get that deadly silence. Now, on the Sundays where the plan came together, I was on Cloud 9. But more often than not, those Sunday morning Sunday School lessons bombed for me. I may have just been a bad teacher. Who knows. But can you think of some times where you made a great plan and it fell apart?

So what ensures that plans will succeed? Well...I think the Jesus plan succeeded because it was God's plan. You see one of the culminating points in our passage today. ¹⁶“And 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.’” Can you imagine being Jesus in that moment? Having this grand plan that’s taken hundreds and even thousands of years to plan come together at this point? To say that you would be overwhelmed and ecstatic is an understatement. Words cannot describe the feeling of that moment. The times that I’ve been most blessed to see a plan come together is actually the times that I wasn’t in control. That might sound strange. Because when we make plans, we are the ones that are in control. We make the details. We put it together. We make sure the plan succeeds. But what we often fail to recognize is that so much is out of our control. I can make a great financial plan, but the markets could dive. Christine or I could lose our job. We could run into a lot of expenses we didn’t expect. A tornado could come through and carry my car 10 miles away. So much of my plans don’t calculate for those things that are out of my control. I think as you are making plans, the big question is, where is God in your plans? Where is God in your plans?

For those of you in the last third of your life. Or as some say, your “Twilight Years.” You may be saying, “God has plans for my life? I’m in the last third of my life. God can’t possibly have any more plans for me.” I beg to differ. It may not look the same. You may not be able to do the same things you used to. But I believe God even has plans for the aging individual. As Brethren Pastor Curtis Dubble, who is a retired minister in his twilight years, once said “God is not done with you.” God is not done with you. I know that it can feel like that as you age. Like the world is passing you by and that you are not worth something. That you don’t matter. But I want to claim that God still has plans for you.

As your making plans for vacation for the summer, have you invited God into that planning? As you make future financial plans, have you invited God in? As you prepare for a home renovation or project, have you invited God in? As you plan for retirement, have you invited God in? Because I think the key ingredient that many of us miss in our planning is allowing God to weave into our plans. And maybe even at times ask God, what is your plan for me? What are you calling me to? What next steps do you have in store for me? Because I can tell you from experience, that when you allow God to be part of your plans, great things happen. I’m not saying everything will be perfect. And I’m not saying things won’t be challenging, but when God’s plan comes together and we get to witness the culminating points of His grand plan, it is a magnificent experience. Maybe not descending like a dove, but pretty close. Because you understand that these plans cannot come together without the hand of God.

Just a quick side note, notice that in our scripture the Trinity is present. In light of our continued series on the Trinity, notice that Jesus is present, fulfilling all righteousness. The Holy Spirit is present as it descends like a dove. And the Father

is present as the voice from heaven saying, “This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased.” This scripture reinforces the oneness of God and the distinctiveness of God. What is being fulfilled in Jesus, is also being fulfilled in the Father and Holy Spirit. Because they are one.

This moment that we see today in our passage is just one culminating point of many culminating points of God’s plan. As you take a look at your past, where have you made plans and it bombed? Was God part of that plan? Or was it just your plan? Wanting that independence from God? I wonder what would happen if we stopped making our own plans and we started listening for God’s plan? As we continue down this spiritual emphasis on prayer this year, have you prayed for God’s plan to come alive in your life? Have you attempted to listen to God in prayer? As you may have seen in the email that I sent out this past week, I’m looking for 2-3 people to journey with spiritually to a deeper relationship with God. If you’re someone trying to listen for the spirit of God in your life, it may be a good opportunity to answer the invitation to journey with me as we listen together for God’s plans in your life. In sync with our Trinity series, what does it look like to have this relationship with the Trinity? Well...as we learned last week the first thing is to be willing to serve God. To repent and listen for the voice of God. And as we are learning today, to obey God’s call upon your life. Because God has far greater plans for you and I than we can probably imagine. And when we get to see and engage in those culminating moments of a good plan come together we experience the joy of serving the Trinity. For Jeremiah 29:11-14 says, “¹¹For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the LORD, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope. ¹²Then when you call upon me and come and pray to me, I will hear you. ¹³When you search for me, you will find me; if you seek me with all your heart, ¹⁴I will let you find me, says the LORD, and I will restore your fortunes and gather you from all the nations and all the places where I have driven you, says the LORD, and I will bring you back to the place from which I sent you into exile.” God brought the people back to Him through His Son Jesus. God brings us back to Him through Jesus Christ and the work of the Trinity. One of God’s culminating points came together in this baptism where He was well pleased. God is well pleased with you and me as we listen for God’s grand plans for our lives. Amen.