

**Matthew 3:13-17**  
**January 8, '17**

**“WHY ME?”**

**“WHY ME?”**

**IT'S A QUESTION WE HAVE ALL ASKED AT ONE  
TIME OR ANOTHER, ISN'T IT?**

**IF YOU HAVEN'T, YOU'VE EITHER BEEN VERY  
FORTUNATE OR, PERHAPS, NOT VERY HONEST.**

**FOR MOST OF US, IF WE HAVEN'T ACTUALLY  
ASKED IT, WE'VE AT LEAST *THOUGHT* OF ASKING IT,  
HAVEN'T WE?**

**AND WHEN WE SEE A SERMON WITH THAT  
TITLE, WE DRAW A CONCLUSION ABOUT THE  
DIRECTION THAT SERMON WILL TAKE.**

**WE MAY EVEN HAVE AN EXPECTATION OF THE  
ACTUAL PASSAGE ON WHICH THAT SERMON WILL  
BE BASED.**

**AND IF WE CAN'T NARROW IT DOWN TO A SPECIFIC PASSAGE, WE'LL AT LEAST HAVE A PRETTY GOOD IDEA OF A BIBLICAL PERSON ON WHOM THE SERMON WILL FOCUS.**

**IT'S GOTTA BE JOB, RIGHT?**

**YOU COULD ALMOST OPEN YOUR BIBLE TO THE BOOK OF JOB AND RANDOMLY POINT YOUR FINGER ON THE PAGE & FIND VERSES THAT WOULD BE APPROPRIATE FOR A SERMON ENTITLED "WHY ME?"**

**ANOTHER GOOD CANDIDATE, THOUGH, WOULD BE THE APOSTLE PAUL.**

**BY HIS OWN ACCOUNT, PAUL ENDURED MORE TRIALS & TRIBULATIONS THAN MOST ANY OF US WILL EVER BE ASKED TO ENDURE.**

**SURELY, HE COULD LOGICALLY & REASONABLY HAVE ASKED, "WHY ME?"**

**SO THERE'S JOB AS AN OLD TESTAMENT MODEL  
& PAUL AS A NEW TESTAMENT MODEL OF  
INDIVIDUALS WHO COULD SERVE AS THE BASIS OF A  
SERMON ADDRESSING THE QUESTION "WHY ME?"**

**BUT THE PASSAGE WE'VE READ THIS MORNING?**

**IT DOESN'T SEEM TO FIT AT ALL, DOES IT?**

**THIS IS THE DAY WE CALL "BAPTISM OF THE  
LORD SUNDAY" AND WE'VE READ MATTHEW'S  
ACCOUNT OF THAT EVENT.**

**IT DOESN'T SEEM AT ALL TO BE CONNECTED TO  
THE OFT-ASKED QUESTION "WHY ME?" - AT LEAST  
NOT IN THE TRADITIONAL SENSE IN WHICH THE  
QUESTION IS ASKED.**

**WHEN WE THINK OF THAT QUESTION, WE THINK  
OF IT BEING ASKED IN A NEGATIVE FASHION.**

WE TAKE THE TITLE OF THE HAROLD KUSHNER  
CLASSIC - WHY DO BAD THINGS HAPPEN TO GOOD  
PEOPLE? – AND MAKE IT PERSONAL – “*WHY DO BAD  
THINGS HAPPEN TO ME?*”

THERE IS AN IMPLIED “*BECAUSE I DON’T  
DESERVE IT*” THAT WE TACK ON TO THE QUESTION.

IN OTHER WORDS, WHAT WE’RE REALLY  
ASKING IS, “*WHY DO BAD THINGS HAPPEN TO ME,  
BECAUSE I DON’T DESERVE IT.*”

WE COME BACK, THOUGH, TO THIS PASSAGE  
WE’VE JUST READ & IT DOESN’T SEEM TO FIT WITH  
THE QUESTION.

WHAT DOES THE BAPTISM OF JESUS HAVE TO DO  
WITH THE QUESTION “WHY ME?”

WHAT COULD POSSIBLY BE SO BAD ABOUT  
BAPTISM – EITHER FOR JOHN – THE ONE DOING THE

**BAPTIZING, OR FOR JESUS – THE *BAPTIZEE* – THAT  
WOULD CAUSE EITHER ONE OF THEM TO ASK, “WHY  
ME?”**

**IT *DOES* MAKE SENSE – BUT ONLY IF WE CHANGE  
OUR FOCUS.**

**WHAT IS REQUIRED IS NOT A SLIGHT CHANGE  
OF FOCUS BUT, RATHER, A COMPLETE REVERSAL OF  
THE WAY WE TRADITIONALLY VIEW THAT  
QUESTION.**

**ORDINARILY, WHEN WE THINK OF THIS STORY  
OF THE BAPTISM OF JESUS, WE THINK OF THE  
EVENT ITSELF & ALL OF THE MIRACULOUS  
ELEMENTS IT CONTAINS – THE HEAVENS BEING  
RIPPED OPEN, THE DESCENT OF THE DOVE & THE  
VOICE OF GOD PROCLAIMING, “*THIS IS MY BELOVED  
SON, WITH WHOM I AM WELL-PLEASED.*”**

**IMAGINE BEING IN THE CROWD THAT DAY &  
HEARING THAT VOICE.**

**HOW DOES IT SOUND?**

**TO HELP PREPARE YOU FOR THE REVERSAL OF  
THE WAY WE UNDERSTAND THE “WHY ME?”  
QUESTION, LET ME SUGGEST A DIFFERENT WAY OF  
UNDERSTANDING THAT HEAVENLY VOICE.**

**TRY TO IMAGINE THE SOUND OF THAT VOICE  
BEING BOTH STRONG & GENTLE - POWERFUL, YET  
MELODIC.**

**TRY TO HEAR IT AS THE SOUND OF A LOVING &  
ADORING YOUNG MOTHER, INTRODUCING HER  
NEWBORN SON FOR THE FIRST TIME TO EAGERLY  
AWAITING FRIENDS & FAMILY MEMBERS - “*THIS IS  
MY BELOVED SON WITH WHOM I AM WELL-PLEASED.*”**

**THAT’S NOT THE WAY WE TRADITIONALLY  
THINK OF THAT DIVINE VOICE FROM HEAVEN, IS IT?**

**SO, TOO, WITH THAT QUESTION, “*WHY ME?*”**

**IT’S CONNECTION TO THIS PASSAGE IS NOT IN  
THE ACTION-PACKED, MIRACLE-FILLED SECOND  
HALF OF THE STORY, BUT RATHER IN THE BRIEF,  
MUNDANE & SEEMINGLY INNOCUOUS DIALOGUE  
BETWEEN JESUS & JOHN.**

**THIS BAPTISMAL STORY IS FOUND IN ALL FOUR  
GOSPELS BUT, INTERESTINGLY, THIS EXCHANGE  
BETWEEN JESUS & JOHN IS ONLY FOUND IN  
MATTHEW.**

**AND HERE’S WHERE THE “WHY ME?” QUESTION  
ENTERS.**

**ISN’T JOHN, IN ESSENCE, ASKING “*WHY ME? WHY  
AM I THE ONE WHO WILL BAPTIZE THE MESSIAH?*”**

***WHY HAVE I BEEN GIVEN THIS INCREDIBLE HONOR & PRIVILEGE?"***

**IT'S REALLY VERY MUCH THE OPPOSITE OF OUR TRADITIONAL UNDERSTANDING, ISN'T IT?**

**WE THINK OF "WHY ME?" AS IN, "*WHY HAVE I BEEN SO CURSED?*"**

**JOHN IS ASKING THE QUESTION AS IN "*WHY HAVE I BEEN SO BLESSED?*"**

**WE THINK OF "*WHY ME? WHAT HAVE I DONE TO DESERVE THIS?*" IN A NEGATIVE CONTEXT.**

**JOHN ASKS "*WHY ME? WHAT HAVE I DONE TO DESERVE THIS?*" IN THE MOST POSITIVE FASHION IMAGINABLE.**

**AND ISN'T THAT, PERHAPS, A BETTER WAY TO LOOK AT LIFE & A BETTER WAY TO CONSIDER THAT QUESTION?**



**I THINK THIS FITS, NOT ONLY THIS PASSAGE  
ABOUT THE BAPTISM OF JESUS BUT I THINK IT ALSO  
FITS WITH THIS DAY OF ORDINATION &  
INSTALLATION OF OFFICERS.**

**FIRST, LET ME OFFER PERSONAL  
OBSERVATIONS OF THE FITTING NATURE OF THIS  
PASSAGE & THIS QUESTION.**

**I'VE RECENTLY TALKED ABOUT THE  
TREMENDOUS PRIVILEGE I FEEL IT IS TO  
EXPERIENCE VARIOUS ASPECTS OF MINISTRY –  
THINGS LIKE SERVING COMMUNION, OFFICIATING  
AT WEDDINGS OR READING LUKE'S CHRISTMAS  
STORY ON CHRISTMAS EVE.**

**I WOULD ADD TO THAT LIST THE ORDINATION  
OF CHURCH OFFICERS.**

**FROM THE FIRST TIME I EVER DID IT, I NEVER  
CEASE TO BE OVERWHELMED BY IT.**

**IT IS ONE OF THOSE EXPERIENCES THAT  
PROFOUNDLY LEAVES ME WITH A “*WHY ME? WHAT  
HAVE I DONE TO DESERVE THIS?*” FEELING.**

**IT’S VERY SIMILAR TO WHAT JOHN WAS  
FEELING AS HE WAS GIVEN THE TREMENDOUS  
HONOR & PRIVILEGE OF BAPTIZING JESUS.**

**GRANTED, THERE ARE NO MESSIAHS BEING  
ORDAINED THIS MORNING & YET THERE ARE  
INDIVIDUALS FAR MORE GIFTED & IMMENSELY  
MORE SPIRITUALLY DEVOTED THAN ME – AND I’M  
ORDAINING THEM!**

**THAT’S MY PERSONAL OBSERVATION OF THE  
CONNECTION BETWEEN THE “WHY ME?” QUESTION,**

**THE ORDINATION OF OFFICERS & THE BAPTISM OF JESUS.**

**I'M SURE MOST OF OUR NEWLY-ORDAINED OFFICERS HAVE MUCH THE SAME FEELING – AND, IF NOT, THEY SHOULD!**

**YOU'RE THINKING – “*WHY ME? WHAT HAVE I DONE TO DESERVE THIS?!*”**

**YOU'RE WONDERING WHY GOD HAS CALLED YOU INTO SERVICE?**

**WHY HAS GOD CHOSEN YOU AS A LEADER IN THE LIFE OF CHRIST'S CHURCH?**

**LET'S GO BACK TO THE TRADITIONAL WAY WE UNDERSTAND THE “WHY ME?” QUESTION.**

**IT HAS OFTEN BEEN SUGGESTED THAT THERE ARE BETTER WAYS TO UNDERSTAND IT WHEN IT'S USED IN THE CUSTOMARY NEGATIVE WAY.**

INSTEAD OF ASKING “WHY ME?,” PERHAPS WE SHOULD ASK “*WHY NOT ME?*”

MANY OF YOU RECALL DAVID BAILEY SAYING THAT WHEN HE ASKED THE “WHY ME?” QUESTION OF GOD FOLLOWING HIS BRAIN TUMOR DIAGNOSIS, HE HEARD GOD TELL HIM THAT THE QUESTION HE SHOULD REALLY BE ASKING WAS “*WHAT NOW?*”

MAYBE BOTH OF THOSE ARE ALSO BETTER QUESTIONS TO BE ASKING WHEN WE REVERSE OUR UNDERSTANDING.

WHEN WE’RE ASKING “*WHY ME? WHY HAVE I BEEN SO BLESSED? WHAT HAVE I DONE TO DESERVE THIS?*” – PERHAPS WE SHOULD FOLLOW THOSE QUESTIONS WITH “*WHY NOT ME?*” & “*WHAT NOW?*”

**BECAUSE, YOU SEE, I THINK THIS TAKES US  
BACK TO THIS PASSAGE & BACK TO THE BAPTISM  
OF JESUS & THE REASON FOR THAT BAPTISM.**

**WE'RE CONFUSED BY IT & MATTHEW – AND  
ONLY MATTHEW AMONG THE GOSPEL WRITERS –  
REALLY OPENLY SHARES OUR CONFUSION WHEN HE  
ADDS THIS BRIEF BIT OF DIALOGUE BETWEEN JESUS  
AND JOHN.**

**WHEN HE HAS JOHN SAYING “*I NEED TO BE  
BAPTIZED BY YOU, AND DO YOU COME TO ME?!*” –  
MATTHEW IS REALLY SHARING HIS OWN  
CONFUSION ABOUT THE MATTER!**

**AND THE RESPONSE OF JESUS – “*LET IT BE SO  
NOW, FOR IT IS PROPER FOR US IN THIS WAY TO  
FULFILL ALL RIGHTEOUSNESS*” – ARE THE VERY**

**FIRST WORDS THAT JESUS SPEAKS IN MATTHEW'S  
GOSPEL!**

**WE THINK OF BAPTISM AS SIMPLY BEING A  
CLEANSING FROM SIN & THAT'S WHY WE CAN'T  
UNDERSTAND WHY JESUS HAD TO BE BAPTIZED.**

**I THINK BAPTISM IS ALSO A WAY IN WHICH  
JESUS IDENTIFIES WITH OUR HUMANITY.**

**EVEN THOUGH JESUS WAS SINLESS, HIS BAPTISM  
IS A WAY OF ENTERING INTO OUR WORLD &  
IDENTIFYING WITH EVERY ONE OF US.**

**THE IMPLICATIONS OF THIS ARE ENORMOUS –  
STARTING WITH THAT SAME QUESTION.**

**“WHY ME?”**

**WHETHER IT'S ME AS A MINISTER OF WORD &  
SACRAMENT BEING ASTOUNDED THAT I HAVE BEEN  
CALLED UPON TO EXPERIENCE SOME OF THE**

**GREATEST MOMENTS OF LIFE IMAGINABLE OR  
WHETHER IT'S SOMEONE BEING ORDAINED INTO A  
CHURCH OFFICE WITH DUTIES & RESPONSIBILITIES  
OR WHETHER IT'S EVERY ONE OF US AS PART OF  
THE BODY OF CHRIST CALLED UPON TO SERVE  
THOSE AROUND US, WE DON'T DO IT ALONE.**

**ONE OF THE MOST IMPORTANT MOMENTS OF  
MY LIFE HAPPENED WHEN I WAS SERVING AS A  
STUDENT HOSPITAL CHAPLAIN WHILE I WAS IN  
SEMINARY.**

**IT WAS INCREDIBLY AWKWARD &  
UNCOMFORTABLE TO WALK INTO A ROOM AND  
TALK TO A PATIENT & THEN PRAY WITH THEM.**

**I SHARED MY DISCOMFORT WITH MY  
SUPERVISOR & TOLD HIM I JUST DIDN'T FEEL  
QUALIFIED TO DO THAT.**

**I REMEMBER HIM LOOKING AT ME & SAYING  
“THE REASON YOU DON’T FEEL QUALIFIED IS  
BECAUSE YOU’RE NOT!**

**AND YOU NEVER WILL BE.**

**BUT WHO SAID ANYTHING ABOUT BEING  
QUALIFIED?**

**WHAT YOU TRY TO PASS OFF AS HUMILITY IS, IN  
REALITY, THE EPITOME OF ARROGANCE!**

**YOU THINK YOU HAVE TO HAVE SOME SPECIAL  
ABILITY OR GIFT - AS IF YOU’RE THE ONE DOING  
SOMETHING.**

**IT’S NOT ABOUT YOU – IT’S ABOUT WHO YOU  
REPRESENT.**

**YOU ARE LITTLE MORE THAN A CHANNEL FOR  
GOD’S PRESENCE & GOD’S GRACE IN ANOTHER  
PERSON’S LIFE.**



***YOU GO AS A REPRESENTATIVE OF JESUS CHRIST.”***

**THAT WAS AN “AH-HA” MOMENT FOR ME THAT  
I’VE NEVER FORGOTTEN.**

**THAT’S TRUE FOR ALL OF US, ISN’T IT?**

**REGARDLESS OF THE FORM IT TAKES, EVERY  
SINGLE ONE OF US IS CALLED BY GOD TO SERVE IN  
SOME FORM OR FASHION.**

**TO GO BACK TO A THEME WE’VE BEEN USING  
FOR MONTHS NOW, WHEN GOD PRESENTS AN OPEN  
DOOR OF SERVICE TO YOU, AND YOU’RE INCLINED  
TO ASK “*WHY ME? WHY HAVE I BEEN SO BLESSED?  
WHAT HAVE I DONE TO DESERVE THIS?*” –**

**REMEMBER, YOU DON’T GO ALONE.**

**YOU ARE LITTLE MORE THAN A CHANNEL BEING  
USED BY CHRIST HIMSELF TO SHOW HIS LOVE.**

**HE'S THERE AT YOUR SIDE & *YOUR* WORK IS *HIS*  
WORK. AMEN.**

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