Text: Matthew 3:13-17, Romans 6:1-11

**Introduction**

You’ve been in one of those situations where what is happening just strikes your gut as wrong, right? Whether its “a glitch in the matrix”, or realizing you are surrounded by the wrong people. Or the spotlight is on the wrong person. Or we are trespassing on the sacred. Or we realize that we’ve forgotten something much more important. Or…or these are all the things that start to run through our heads at that moment.

These are not the moments of accountability, when something is happening to us that we long expected but by fortune had escaped. Those are the moments when you know exactly what is happening. You gut falls, but you know why. The moments I’m trying to invoke are those where we’d say “no, this is wrong”, but probably not know why. Sometimes we figure it out later. Sometimes the feeling passes. Sometimes the situation passes, but that moment sticks in our heads. And 20 years later we wake up in the middle of the night asking why?

**Text**

The baptism of Jesus is one of those moments. John has been out in the wilderness of the Jordan calling people to repentance. He’s been calling them to reform Israel, to pass through the Jordan into the promised land again. And He’s been telling those who come out, the Day of the Lord is at hand. The messiah is just around the corner. So, go back home and bear the fruits of repentance, and the King we have all been waiting for will soon call you to action.

And remember that John is the cousin of Jesus. He’s known Jesus and supposedly the stories that we’ve all reminded ourselves of the past month since he was a little child. This is now the man who leaped in Elizabeth’s womb when Mary approached. Who according to the Evangelist John would point and Jesus and say “behold, the Lamb of God.”

And this Jesus comes up to John in the Jordan and submits himself to be baptized…to undergo this baptism of repentance. And John immediately feels that something wrong. No Jesus, not you. Not this baptism. Not by me. “I need to be baptized by you, and you come to me?”

But Jesus replies to John with two phrases:

First, “Let it be so now.”

Second, “thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.”

And at these words, John consents.

**Christology**

Why was Jesus presenting himself for a baptism of repentance? A recrossing of the Jordan and a reforming of Israel?

Let’s take the second part of Jesus’ answer first. The entire reason that John was proclaiming repentance was because Israel had failed. There was little righteousness in Israel, let alone all righteousness. As much as the Pharisees might proclaim that they were the children of Abraham. As much as the priests might have thought that another round of sacrifice in the 2nd temple would do it. Both of those things were jokes by this time. The Priesthood was an office bought and sold. Less concerned with righteousness than with maintaining its power. The Pharisees would tithe their mint and cumin, and tell their parents “sorry, I have nothing for you.” They would fulfill the outward law, while in Jesus’ words being “whitewashed tombs.” They would appropriate the righteous words of God to justify wickedness.

We should not feel superior. If you’ve ever read Romans 1, that’s what Paul say we do. “Though they know God's righteous decree that those who practice such things deserve to die, they not only do them but give approval to those who practice them. (Rom. 1:32 ESV)” Nobody has even been declared righteous by works of the law. We always manage to turn the law into a racket, a grift. And this is not because the law itself is unrighteous. The law of God is good and wise. But physical Israel always fails.

To fulfill all righteousness it would take a new Israel…an Israel reduced to one…an Israel who what not metaphorically the Son of God, but “this one is my beloved son.”

This is fitting to fulfill all righteousness, because it is here, in the waters of the Jordan, that Jesus starts to stand in the place of Israel. If in the incarnation Jesus is the 2nd Adam. If at Christmas we see humanity as it was meant to be. In this act of Epiphany we see Israel as it was meant to be. Christ crosses the Jordan and fulfills what physical Israel never could nor can. He secures the promised land. He fulfills all righteousness.

**Moral**

Now we might say something like, “that’s fine for Jesus, but what does this mean for us?” We failed, Jesus succeeds, good for him, but what’s that mean for us?

“Let it be so now.”

Now Christ stands for us. Now Christ receives the baptism of repentance and stands with sinners. Now Christ is the true Israel. And as the one who stands for us in this baptism now, Christ accepts the death that was due to sin. Christ receives the baptism of fire that leads to the cross. “Let it be so now.”

Jesus takes the baptism that we deserve, such that as the Israel who has secured the promised land, he can tell those who follow him, “go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them.” Jesus takes our baptism of repentance, that he might give to us his baptism of faith.

In that baptism in the Jordan, Jesus is the anointed son, the substitute for all Israel. He will suffer and die, but by his death he will conquer death. And will rise to new life. And all of this is what is given to us in those waters of baptism that we pass by on our way into this Israel.

We have been baptized into Christ’s death. And because we have been made part of this new Israel in this that death is not longer a failure, but the path to eternal life. Just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.

By those waters we have been crucified with Christ, and by those waters we are no longer enslaved to sin. In those waters we have died with Christ, and the dead are free from sin. Free from suffering. Free from it toil.

So should we who have been freed from sin, continue in it? State of grace, o happy condition, sin as I please and still have remission? As Paul would say – “heck no.” Stop being stupid. You have been freed from sin, why would you choose to go back to death? Because that is what sin is, death.

**Eschatological**

In Christ all righteousness has been given to you by those waters of his baptism. In Christ you have been freed from bondage to sin. You have real choices now. And in Christ, having suffered a death like his, we will surely share in a resurrection like his. And in that resurrection death no longer has a claim on us.

You are the Israel the Christ has called. Not as John was calling. Christ alone fulfilled that. And has given you all righteousness by his grace in his baptism. Christ has called all to this life through the waters of his Jordan. As Luther put it in the baptismal prayer in our liturgy, “Through the Baptism in the Jordan of Your beloved Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, You sanctified and instituted all waters to be a blessed flood, and a lavish washing away of sin.” You have been made the Israel of Christ and ready to enter the promised land through those waters.

Let it be so for now.

Now we know that all righteousness has been fulfilled, not yet have we received the fullness of glory.

Now we know that Christ has taken our baptism and defeated death, not yet have we left go of all fear of that monster.

Now we know that Christ has freed us from sin, not yet have we put away the sin that lives in our members.

Now we know that Christ is at the right hand of God and Satan has been thrown out and can no longer accuse us, not yet have we mastered telling old scratch to get lost.

Let it be so for now. Sin, death and the devil have been vanquished.

This life – this season of Epiphany – is about a growing awareness of just how finished they are for the one who lives in the baptism of Jesus.

And soon, all righteousness shall appear in fulness. And we will all be changed. Amen.