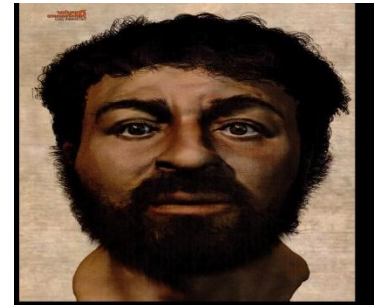


The Baptism of Jesus: The Brokenness of Assumptions

Before I begin the message, I want to make certain that everyone here has a rock in their hand. And I want you to hold it until I tell you to release them. If you don't have a rock, take hold of something near you. A piece of flatware, spice bottle, change.

As we are working through this sermon series of looking at the stain glass windows of this sanctuary, we recognized that each window is made up of broken pieces that when put together are beautiful pieces of art. We've also recognized how each window shares a Bible story of brokenness and the beauty and wholeness God offers us in Jesus. So we have talked about the brokenness of being without a Shepherd, the vulnerable, the abandoned, the lonely. Today we are going to look at the brokenness of assumptions. We all make them. We make assumptions about people based on their clothing, hair styles, piercings, and tattoos. We make assumptions based on ages: we assume teenagers just don't understand and we assume the older generations don't get it, when in reality they all know more than what we give each other credit for. You all are making assumptions of what the rock stands for, and we will see later if you are correct.

However, we make assumptions with religion too. Remember a few weeks ago I shared how the Samaritans assumed Noah's ark landed on Mount Gerizim, but there is no proof. And for many, there is an assumption that Jesus looks like a white Caucasian man, when in actuality he couldn't have, he was born in Israel. In fact a number of years ago Popular Mechanics developed this picture of Jesus based upon the time and land he was from, as well as scriptural descriptions.



How about the Jordan River. When we hear this story that Jesus is baptized in the Jordan, we tend to picture something pristine, like we see in this beautiful window. Water that is blue, free of any dirt or particles.



But reality is, that wasn't the water of Jordan in Jesus' time. Maybe you remember the story of Naaman in 2 Kings 5. He was an army commander for the nation of Aram. But he had leprosy. His wife's servant, an Israelite, tells him about Elisha, the prophet in her homeland can cure him. Naaman goes to see Elisha and Naaman is told to go wash in the Jordan River seven times to be healed. Naaman is not happy with this suggestion and says,

¹² Are not Abana and Pharpar, the rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? Couldn't I wash in them and be cleansed?" Now here is a picture of those rivers in Damascus:



And here are the waters of the Jordan.



Is this an assumption that the waters are better in Damascus? Probably not, they clearly are cleaner based upon the landscape they run through. The Jordan river was and still is a runway for natural dirt and sadly human waste, but it wasn't the water itself that would do the healing, it was God. And eventually Naaman does give in and goes to the Jordan and is healed.

When we learn in our lessons today that John was baptizing in the Jordan, we know definitively that he was baptizing to wash away the sins of the people, using the dirty waters. But his assumptions of the work of Christ are off.

Here is the background. Just like the stories of Jesus between birth and his adulthood are scarce, those same years for John are not mentioned at all in the Scriptures we know. However, there is an apocrypha writing about that time for John. Apocrypha, are texts that are not part of the Holy Scriptures we know and follow, but they can be read and used for an understanding of the early Christians beliefs. The apocrypha that tells of the growth of John the Baptist is titled, *The Life of John the Baptist* and it is told through the voice of an Egyptian bishop of the fourth century.

The writing begins with the same details of John's birth we read in the Gospel of Luke, how Zechariah and Elizabeth were an older couple, and the angel Gabriel visits Zechariah to tell him they will have a son who will prepare the way for the Lord. After the birth of John, and then the birth of Jesus, this apocrypha writing then shares that Zechariah dies protecting his family from Herod's soldiers, while Elizabeth flees with John into the desert. Five years later, when John is seven and half years old, Elizabeth dies. Jesus, **"whose eyes sees heaven and earth" (7:3)**, sees John grieving and spirits himself and Mary to the desert where John is. They bury Elizabeth and Jesus and Mary remain with John for seven days, teaching him how to live in the desert. Then Mary and Jesus return to Nazareth, leaving John under the protection of Gabriel and watched by the souls of his parents.¹

From there, the Scriptures carry on telling us how John grew up eating locusts and honey. And while according to today's lesson from the gospel of John, John the Baptist did not know Jesus **v 31 I myself did not know him, but I came baptizing with water for this reason, that he might be revealed to Israel.** however according to all four gospels John did know that he was sent to prepare the way for **"the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" v29.**

So John preached a message of repentance and baptized people in the Jordan to wash away their sins and proclaiming: ¹¹ **"I baptize you with water for repentance. But after me comes one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire - Matthew 3:11** And that's where the story picks up with assumptions, because Jesus comes to be baptized by Jesus and John says, **"I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?"** John is making an *assumption* isn't he? That the baptism he is being asked to give to Jesus is to wash away his sins like the other baptisms John has given. Which would not make sense if Jesus is the Messiah. However, the text continues, ¹⁵ **Jesus answered him, "Let it be so now, for it is proper for us in this way to fulfill all righteousness."** To fulfill all righteousness is another of way of saying to follow God's will to make everything right between God and us. Jesus says in order for that to occur, he must experience this baptism. This baptism of going down into the dirty waters of the Jordan, that holds all the slime, waste, and filth of our everyday lives, and letting that dirty water wash over him so that *in coming up, we see a God who has chosen to be one of us, with us.* Or as Matthew's text reads, 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 God's Spirit descending like a dove and alighting on him.** To alight means to descend and settle. The Spirit is upon Jesus, the lamb of God, to take away the sins, that is all the slime, the filth, the waste, the problems of the world. No assumptions here, Jesus is God with us, to walk with us, to serve us, to save us, when we release ourselves to his care and the guidance of the Holy Spirit. And when we do, we learn a better way, a clearer way.

In fact in one of his last messages with his disciples, Jesus reiterates that. In **John 13** after he washes the feet of the disciples (notice, washing away the dirt, the grime that their sandaled feet would have brought in) Jesus says this, ³⁴ **I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another.** ³⁵ **By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."** And then in that same teaching Jesus goes on to say, **"If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever...This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor**

¹ <https://www.apocryphicity.ca/2014/10/10/more-christian-apocrypha-updates-13-life-of-john-the-baptist-by-serapion/>

knows him. You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you.” John 14:15-17 Then he says, **“the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you.” John 14:26** Jesus says the Spirit is our Advocate, some translations say Counselor, or Comforter, or Friend. The New American Standard Bible says “Helper”. *The Spirit helps us.*

Are you still holding that rock? What’s going to happen when you let it go? You will be able to open your hand, stretch it, shake it. But you will also have a hand that is now free, free to help, free to love, free to worship and praise, because you have let that stone go.

Friends, in this life we find ourselves weighed down with broken rocks of this world that get in the way of living the right life God wants for us. But Jesus has come to set the record straight, by *going down into the dirt, the filth, the waste that form these rocks*, and washing all of it away with the Holy Spirit that helps us by renewing us and reviving us to live beyond any and all assumptions. To live a life of discipleship love.

As I close this message, I am going to close with a time of prayer that will include some silence where we can each confess what is weighing us down. And after we have finished that confession, and said the Lord’s prayer, then open your hand, put down the rock, and on your way out, let it go. Release it in our parking lot, release it at the park. Or maybe wait and release it at home, at a spot you can see when you need to remind yourself to release all things to the Divine, who is with us, to help us. You decide, but I hope this act, and that window will inspire your trust in the work of the Chosen One and the Holy Spirit for a beautiful life of rightness with God and one another.

Let us pray: Gracious God, I release to You the burdens that I have been carrying, burdens that You never intended for me to carry. I cast all my cares upon You—all my worries, all my fears. You have told me to not be anxious about anything, but rather to bring everything to You in prayer with thankfulness. Calm my restless spirit, quiet my anxious heart, still my troubling thoughts with the assurance that You are in control. I let go of my grip upon the things I have been hanging onto, with opened hands I come to You. (release to God what is bothering you, upsetting you, stopping you from feeling God’s Spirit blessing you)

I release to Your will all that I am trying to manipulate; I release to Your authority all that I am trying to control; I release to Your timing all that I have been striving to make happen. I thank you for Your promise to sustain me, preserve me, and guard all that I have entrusted to Your keeping. Protect my heart and mind with Your peace, the peace that passes all understanding. And may your will be done in my life, as I ask in Jesus’ name. Amen.