

January 12, 2014

NOW IS THE TIME

by Pastor Clarissa Martinelli

You may have heard the story of the man who purchased a horse that formerly belonged to a preacher. In order to make the horse go, the command, “Praise the Lord,” had to be given. To stop the horse, “Hallelujah!” was the instruction. The purchaser did all right in getting the horse started. “Praise the Lord!” he shouted. The horse took off at a full gallop and headed for a cliff. “Whoa!” the man shouted, but to no avail. Suddenly he realized he had forgotten the command to stop the horse. Just in the nick of time he remembered. “Hallelujah!” The horse came to a stop at the very edge of the cliff, so that its new owner could look into the chasm below. The man with great excitement and relief shouted, “Praise the Lord!” Remember that saying the wrong thing can get a person into a lot of trouble.

Matthew 3:17 - *And a voice from heaven said, ‘This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased.’*

Sometimes we aren’t sure if “now” is the right time for things. At the Jordan River, about 30 years after Jesus was born, now was the time. Imagine yourself back there, standing on the shoreline of that river in the wilderness, you would be nodding your head in agreement, “Yes, now is the time!” However, you stop and ask - **Time for what?** It’s time for Jesus to be baptized. He hadn’t been baptized as an infant as many times we see in our worship services. His baptism was different. He was baptized for a totally different reason than our reason for baptizing.

There was nothing extraordinary about the Jordan River. It was a common place—a place for watering livestock, filling pails and jars, and washing clothes or dishes. It was an ordinary place; there was nothing majestic or magnificent about it. That is, until Jesus stepped onto its shores.

Before Jesus arrived, however, there was another man sent by God; his name was John. John was a simple man. He wore camel’s hair for clothes and ate honey and insects for dinner—he had been living apart from society in the arid wilderness along the Jordan. And he traveled all along the riverbanks preaching to anyone who would listen. He preached “*a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins*” (**Mark 1:4 NASB**), and everyone came to hear him. John the Baptizer was at the height of his preaching and baptizing ministry.

The Bible says, “*All the people from Judea and Jerusalem were going out to him. They confessed their sins and were baptized by him in the Jordan River*” (**Mark 1:5 NRSV**). Fierce and wildly charismatic, John drew flocks of people to the wilderness to hear him speak and to be baptized by him. Among the multitude stood a thirty-year-old carpenter—Jesus of Nazareth.

Stepping down into the rust-colored river that was the lifeblood of his people, Jesus waded through the muddy stream as it churned around his waist; the cool mud squishing up between his toes with each step.

They had come to hear John preach, but the crowd gathered along the banks of the river that day became witnesses to something far grander. This is how the Bible describes it:

At that time Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan River and wanted John to baptize him. You can almost see John putting out his hands to Jesus saying, “Wait, wait! “Why do you come to me to be baptized? I need to be baptized by you!”

Jesus answered, “Let it be this way for now. We should do all things that are God’s will.” So John agreed to baptize Jesus.

It’s like if the Milwaukee Symphony Orchestra would say to you, “Would you play us a number so that we might have some soothing music to which we can listen?” You would say, “Wait a minute! You should play for me. You’re the professionals. You don’t want to hear me.” In the same way, John recognized Jesus as one who didn’t need repentance or forgiveness in baptism. John knew that Jesus was much greater than he was, and that he wasn’t even fit to tie Jesus’ sandals. And now Jesus wants to be baptized by him? John’s thinking, “This is backwards! This shouldn’t be happening this way!”

It’s easy to understand why John was hesitant to baptize Jesus. After all, John had been “preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins,” and Jesus was the spotless Lamb of God.

As soon as Jesus was baptized, he came up out of the water. Rising up out of the river, Jesus was soaked to the bone. Then heaven opened, and he saw God’s Spirit coming down on him like a dove. And a voice from heaven said, “*This is my Son, whom I love, and I am very pleased with him.*” (**Matthew 3:13-17 NCV**)

So, why did Jesus come to John in the first place?

Listen to Jesus' response, "*Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness. Then John consented*" (15). Jesus was saying, "At another time, John, you would be right in what you're thinking. But NOW is the time for this baptism. Let it be so NOW."

The question we come up with is, "Why did Jesus need to be baptized NOW?" It was not that Jesus needed to get his sins washed away. He was sinless.

Jesus' baptism meant something even more wonderful. As Jesus descended into the water, he was coming down to our level. "Christ was here identifying Himself with sinners." Baptism was for the immoral, the impure, the liars, adulterers and thieves, and yet Jesus willingly plunged into the water as if to say, "I'm with them!"

And Jesus did it because it was what his Father in heaven wanted him to do. It was showing that NOW at the age of 30 he was going to carry out his public ministry. It was NOW that he began the course of work that would take him to the cross. It was NOW that he began the public mission of being the sin-bearer of the entire world. The time was now for Jesus to step in line with sinners. Just like we hear in **2 Corinthians 5:21**, "*God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.*" Now was the time for Jesus to publicly step in line with all sinners and count himself as one of them, though he had done nothing to be in that line.

Take a look at the line and look what Jesus did. All sinners, you and me included, are lined up single file in a row, waiting to stand before our holy Creator. We're going to have to answer to God for all our sins. But then Jesus jumps in line right to the front. He's going to be first to meet this judgment. "**Now is the time!**" Now is the time for Jesus to step in line, to the front of the line, with sinners.

Jesus' great love for you and me caused him to cast his lot with humanity. He came to the river because **WE** are sinners. He was washed because **WE** were not clean. He did what was right because **WE**, so often, do what is wrong. He became like us so that **WE** could become like him.

At his baptism, Jesus had slid himself into our place and offered himself to our heavenly Creator. At Jesus' baptism, "**NOW is the time**, for the God to state a line of acceptance." You can see and hear God say with, of course, a big smile, "I accept your offer, Son." He states a line. It's a line of acceptance.

Just as the waters of baptism provided Jesus with a way to identify with us, they also provide us with a way to identify with him. Inspirational writer Roy Lessin explains, “The waters of baptism paint a vivid picture of our Christian faith—symbolizing the cleansing of our hearts from sin, death to our old way of living, and our resurrection with Christ to walk in newness of life.” **NOW IS THE TIME!**

Every follower of Jesus today receives the same love and power—we each are given the Spirit of God.

The Holy Spirit is a promise to everyone who places his or her faith in Jesus. The Peter said to them, “*Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you, for your children, and for all who are far away, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to him.*” **Acts 2:38-39**

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To remember the Holy Sacrament of Baptism and we became part of Christ—experiencing through faith what Jesus experienced in the Jordan River.

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Jesus’ ministry began in the river and ended on the cross. And, even though his followers would not realize it for sometime, Jesus’ baptism in the river that day was, in fact, a foreshadowing of his death on the cross and his resurrection from the grave.

NOW IS THE TIME!

As we set out on our lifelong journey of following Jesus, our first steps lead us to the riverbanks and we find ourselves covered in the dust (or perhaps mud) of our sins. And then to the cross of salvation that will remove all sins.

NOW IS THE TIME!

If you haven’t already, let me urge you to allow the waters of baptism to become a witness to the testimony of your heart—a heart that is following Jesus and covered in his dust.

NOW IS THE TIME

To identify ourselves with the love and characteristics of Jesus Christ.

NOW IS THE TIME!

Walk down to the river's edge. Remove your sandals. Let the white foam gently splash over your feet. Bow your head. Hold your breath. Take the plunge.

NOW IS THE TIME!

AMEN. AMEN. AMEN.

Adapted - Sermon Notes - 2004; Melvin Rascoe