

Matthew 3:13-17
January 8, 2017

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! Amen.

Have you ever longed for that invitation that just never came? Perhaps it was to the wedding event of the year. Or, maybe it was a date with the special someone you had a crush on. Perhaps, it was simply an invitation to go out with the group from work that meets every Friday afternoon for drinks. Maybe, that invitation was even just to sit at the table with some of the “cool” kids or be invited to ride along to the out-of-town football game or shopping at the mall. I remember many lonely nights my sophomore year of college at the University of Northern Iowa. I had attended community college my freshman year so this was my first semester in the dorms. I was paired up with a roommate who was never around spending most of his time with his girlfriend, thus I was alone. That fact, along with being the introvert I am led me to not really get included on a lot of activities. Many nights I would sit in my room, door open, and just long for someone to stop in and invite me to go do something. I especially hated dinner in the large dormitory cafeteria. So many nights I simply went by myself. I sat and watched as the gang marched down the hall but the invitation to join never came. I would wait until the last possible minute and then go so there wouldn't be as

many people there and I didn't have to be seen sitting by myself. A simple invitation can be such a powerful thing.

Or have you ever been offered that invitation, subsequently said "no" and then kicked yourself for doing so? I did that not so long ago. It was November 12th and the Hawkeyes were hosting the Michigan Wolverines in a night game at Kinnick Stadium. Now if you haven't been to a night game at Kinnick and are a sports fan you need to go. I had been invited to go twice leading up to the game and said "no" both times because I tend to get up pretty early Sunday morning. Additionally, Michigan was ranked #2 and Iowa had just come off a miserable performance at Penn State and quite honestly, I didn't think it would be much of a game. Well, we all know the outcome as Iowa won 14-13 on a last-second field goal. I missed out on one of those rare moments in life.

I wonder what would have happened if John had turned down the invitation to baptize Jesus. We know he didn't but who would blame him if he did. Matthew pointedly tells us John tried to prevent it from happening in this manner even saying to Jesus, "I need to be baptized by you." It just didn't seem logical to John to be the one to baptize this man, the one whom just verses earlier John had prophesied to the Jewish religious leaders, "One who more powerful than I is coming ... I am not worthy to carry his sandals." (v.11) Of course, Jesus

was this one and John knew it; hence, his reluctance to go along with the invitation Jesus offered. He was not worthy. God's ways didn't seem to align with his. And he balked. He turned down the offer. I still wonder what would have happened if John had said no. How would he have felt if he missed out on this opportunity? What regrets might he have had? When he heard the reports of Jesus coming up out of the water, the Spirit of God descending upon him and the voice from the clouds proclaim, "This is my Son, the beloved, with whom I am well pleased." Wow, can you imagine missing out on that grace-filled moment in the in-breaking of God's kingdom?

Many speculate on why Jesus had to be baptized and that is valid question and certainly one way to preach this passage. The bottom line is we really don't know. Many suggest that, like a determined lawyer Matthew was intent on proving who Jesus was – the Messiah. There were many fake Messiahs in that day and clearly Jesus could have been placed in that category as he didn't meet expectations of what the Messiah would be like, look like, or act like. Thus Matthew has to go out of his way, which he does by frequently citing Jewish (Old Testament) scriptures and also by incorporating this piece today about Jesus being baptized by John. He is legitimizing Jesus was a credible Jewish rabbi or teacher. In those days, every once in a while a rabbi would come along who had a

new way of interpreting and understanding the Torah (i.e., God's law) and then the people were left wondering how do we know this person is really of God? The primary means of acknowledging the validity of one's authority was by the public laying on of hands by another longstanding and trusted teacher. John was just such a person; hence, his baptism of Jesus was yet again an epiphany letting the world know who Jesus was. Others indicate Jesus' baptism was necessary to fully enter into and experience the human condition. Some point to the fact this was the start of his public ministry and therefore a visible symbol of that fact and God conferring on him the identity of his beloved Son as Jesus is sent on his way and filling with him the power of the Holy Spirit for the journey ahead.

But what caught my attention this week was the part about John being invited to participate in this extraordinary event. And perhaps there were more present and involved because Jesus counters John's hesitant comments with this, "Let it be so now; for it is proper for us in this way to fulfill all righteousness." We don't exactly know who the "us" is. Was it just John and Jesus or were there more present? Either way, the fact is God chose to carry out God's plan or will, which is what most seem to infer the use of "righteousness" here means, through the invitation and help of others. God chose others to be present in this grace filled moment. Jesus offered the invitation to come alongside him and be a

participant in the saving work that God had begun and will bring to culmination through Jesus. Rather than using his divinity and power he offered the invitation and let God's work be done through the hands of a human being. Pretty amazing stuff!

We, too, are granted that same invitation. We, too, have been given that same choice as John did. Perhaps, not to baptize Jesus but to be a part of the God's mission in the world today. Will we balk at the invitation and miss out on something glorious and the opportunity to grow into a fuller relationship with God's beloved Son, our Lord and Savior or will we accept that invitation, be joined to Jesus' redemptive work in the world, and be transformed by it? Be part of the grace. Be overcome with the awe. Be moved by the Holy Spirit and hear and live out the reality of those same words God extended to Jesus and promises to us – we, too, are beloved by God and God is well pleased with us because God created us. This is a most cherished invitation that we cling to and are called to extend to others. This is a most precious invitation that we are always granted – time and time again – no matter our perceived flaws, no matter how inadequate and unworthy we may feel, or no matter how much of a sinner we or someone else may deem us to be. The fact remains God's grace abounds. Jesus' birth, death, and resurrection trumps everything and we are yet again extended the invitation

to come alongside our Lord and Savior and be part of the redemptive, life-saving, transforming, and amazing work of God. That's our mission. That's our calling. That's the invitation we have been given and that's the invitation God uses us to extend to the world. Amen.