

January 11, 2026

“Pursuing the Kingdom: Commissioning of the King”

Matthew 3:13-17

Vernon Advent Christian Church

Introduction...We're going to continue in our theme, “Pursuing the Kingdom,” and continue to look at what it means to live in the tension of the “already” and “not yet” reality as citizens of God's Kingdom. One of the way that we are going to attempt to live this pursuit of the kingdom out is through our “soon to be formed” community groups.

Community groups are vital for advancing the Kingdom of God by getting us out of the “once a week” going to church format and into the mindset of doing life together in community by fostering deep spiritual growth, mutual support, and practical mission, mirroring the first gatherings of the early church where the scriptures tell us “they devoted themselves to the Apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to the prayers.” (Acts 2:42) Community groups form the “kingdom family,” a support system for sharing struggles, praying, and growing both spiritually and relationally, reflecting the New Testament's emphasis on the Body of Christ.

The purpose of each community group is function as a multi-generational expression of the larger body of VACC and are centered around the Word of God, Fellowship, the Breaking of Bread and Prayer. These weekly groups exist to equip believers to grow in Christ, cultivate unity through meaningful relationships, accountability and the use of our gifts and to provide witness to friends and neighbors by modeling the Gospel of Jesus Christ in community.

Community groups serve as “means of grace,” fostering holiness and allowing believers to exercise their spiritual gifts in a close-knit environment. They provide a place to explore the “now” and “not yet” of the Kingdom, longing for God's reign to break in more fully in their lives and world.

So, starting the week of Jan. 26, we will begin by launching three groups, with the hope of expanding to more as we grow, and you will be getting updates from us in the next week or so with further instructions as to how this will all role out. Please join me in prayer and ask the Lord's blessing on this new and exciting chapter for our church.

There are certain moments in life that bring clarity. A birth, a graduation, a wedding day or even on the other side of the coin a life-changing diagnosis or a death. These events draw a sharp line between what was and what will be. They define us.

Well, at the end of Matthew ch. 3, we witness such a moment in the earthly life of Jesus. This event, his baptism by John in the Jordan River, is not merely a formality. It is the hinge upon which Jesus’ public ministry swings open. It is the very beginning of his public ministry and it is a moment packed with profound theological significance, revealing his mission, his nature, and the nature of God himself. So, let's dive right in. If you are able, please stand in honor of God's word, as I read Matthew 3:13-17. [Read Passage]

The scene opens with a strange tension. John the Baptist has been preaching a message of repentance, which we looked at last week, baptizing people for the forgiveness of sins, an act preparing people for the coming Messiah. The people coming to him are the

tax collectors and the sinners all acknowledging their need for cleansing and confessing their sins. Now, we don't know how long John was preaching in the wilderness, but however long it was, in the midst of his ministry, one day, Jesus steps onto the scene in vs. 13.

We talked last week about how John the Baptist suddenly comes on the scene in Matthew's gospel. We have to refer to Luke for the back story of his parents, Zechariah and Elizabeth, and his status as the eventual forerunner of the Messiah. However, in the first couple of chapters of Matthew, we do have some of the back story of Jesus's infancy. But, again, we have to go to Luke for a more detailed version of the events surrounding his birth and his early childhood, for example, the account where Jesus goes into the temple at the age of 12 and is discussing and teaching really the teachers of the law in that place.

In reality, Matthew, like the other Gospel writers, skip over the rest of Jesus's childhood, the rest of his adolescence, the rest of his early adulthood. In the case of Matthew, his message is clear, he is pointing to Jesus as the King who has come to inaugurate the Kingdom of God here on the earth. We know, again, from the Gospel of Luke (3:23) that Jesus is 30 years old when this takes place, the age at which rabbi's could begin to teach publicly. So, Matthew skips over a majority of the first 30 years of Jesus' life, and now we find Jesus suddenly on the scene with one intention of being baptized by John.

The scriptures tell us Jesus came from Galilee, most likely from his hometown in Nazareth, to the Jordan to John to be baptized by him. Now, why would he be coming to be baptized? Well, we are going to see the baptism of Jesus marks the beginning of his entrance into public ministry, that's the general answer. But again, we have to ask the question why then does he need to be baptized for this purpose? Why can't he just go, and like John, start preaching and teaching and healing and doing all the miracles that he's going to do? Why does he need to be baptized?

Well, apparently this was a sticking point for John as well. For his reaction is similar to probably the same question that we have in our minds this morning. "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?" (v. 14). John understood the order of things. He is the servant and Jesus is the master. John preaches a baptism of repentance and Jesus is without sin. For Jesus to submit to John's baptism seems backwards, almost scandalous. John sees the paradox. He knows Jesus does not need to repent.

And notice Jesus doesn't reject that way of thinking. He doesn't say, "Oh no, you're wrong, actually, I am a sinner in need of repentance. Your baptism is greater than mine." He doesn't say any of that. He agrees with John. He agrees that he is, positionally, superior to John. He agrees that he is sinless.

But John's protest highlights a central truth of the gospel. Our God is a God who chooses to be near us, to be among us, to identify with our human condition, to identify with sinners. The incarnation, God becoming flesh, is the ultimate act of humility and solidarity with us. Jesus doesn't just observe humanity from a safe distance. He wades into our messy, broken, sinful reality. By entering the waters of baptism meant for sinners, Jesus identifies with the very people he came to save.

Paul speaks of the humility of Jesus in Phil. 2 when he says, "Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a

servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.” (Phil. 2:5-8)

What Jesus is doing here is humbling himself to get down on our level, not because he needs it, but because we need it. What Jesus is doing is necessary to God's plan of redemption. Without his baptism, identifying with sinners through the incarnation, Jesus cannot save his people because he cannot cleanse his people. If Jesus doesn't do this, we are doomed with no hope of salvation for, apart from him, we can do nothing to save ourselves.

There is a really important correlation both here and at the end of Jesus's life with the prophecy found in Isaiah 53 where it speaks of the Messiah as the suffering servant who “was numbered among the transgressors.” (Isa. 53:12) Here it's by entering into a baptism that sinners entered into. At the end of its life, it's when he's nailed between two thieves numbered among the transgressors. This is what Jesus came to do to humble himself by coming down to our level, by submitting to what we need and what he gives us on our behalf, to associate and identify with sinners.

Think about that identification. He joins the line of the broken, the hurting, the seeking. He is immersing himself, literally, into human frailty, pain, and need. For us today, this is a powerful reminder that our faith is not in the abstract. The God we worship is a God who meets us where we are. He doesn't wait for us to clean ourselves up before he reaches out. Jesus' baptism is a picture of God's compassion that steps into the mire of human life. He identifies with us in our struggles, our anxiety and our failures.

Jesus tells John this act is necessary “to fulfill all righteousness.” What does that mean? It means more than just following the rules. It means bringing God's saving purpose and plan to completion. Jesus is embracing his mission as the representative of a new humanity. He is obedient to God's plan from the very beginning of his ministry. He is accepting his role as the one who will perfectly live according to God's will where we have failed.

In his baptism, Jesus is essentially saying, “I am here to do what is right in God's eyes. I am here to live a perfect life for humanity, and ultimately, to bear the consequences of humanity's unrighteousness by offering up my life.” He fulfills all righteousness so that we might receive it as a gift. Again, the Apostle Paul says in 2 Cor. 5:21, “He became sin, who knew no sin, so that we might become the righteousness of God.”

When we consider our own lives, we often strive for righteousness, to be good enough, to earn God's favor. This passage reminds us that our hope is not in our own ability to fulfill righteousness, but in Jesus, who has fulfilled it perfectly on our behalf. Our call is to trust in his finished work and strive to live in obedience to his example as citizens of his kingdom.

The culmination of the story is an extraordinary moment of anointing and commissioning. This act of obedience is immediately recognized and affirmed by God the Father. As Jesus comes up from the water, three things happen.

First, the heavens are opened. The separation between heaven and earth is momentarily made visible. We are not given many details about what this looked like, except to say for a brief moment, the invisible things of heaven were made visible on Earth.

The heavens were opened and, then the second thing happened, “he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on him.”

It’s interesting to note that all four Gospels describe the Spirit of God descending like a dove upon Jesus after His baptism. Immediately after John the Baptist baptized Jesus in the Jordan River, as Jesus came up out of the water, both John and Jesus (and probably bystanders, too) saw the Holy Spirit descend from heaven like a dove and settle on Jesus. Usually, the Spirit is not visible to humans, but He was seen by people on this occasion. According to the four accounts, the Spirit took on some physical qualities that resembled a dove. In each description, the descent from heaven revealed that the Holy Spirit had come from God’s presence.

The primary significance is that here we are seeing that Jesus is anointed with the Holy Spirit. Matthew makes it clear from the beginning of his gospel that Jesus is the “Christ,” the promised Messiah, *Meshiach* in the Hebrew and *Christos* in the Greek, both mean “anointed one.”

This scene is reminiscent of Old Testament prophetic commissionings. The commissioning of the prophets, priests and kings in the OT always occurred in God’s presence having been anointed with oil, symbolic of the Holy Spirit underscoring the significance of this baptismal event. The obvious difference here is that there is no need for the symbolic as the Holy Spirit himself comes and rest on Jesus.

And this is the anointing of the Messiah for his mission. The Spirit empowers and commissions him for the work ahead. What we are seeing here is that the Holy Spirit is equipping Jesus, anointing him, setting him apart, empowering him for the ministry that he must embark upon in this earthly ministry. He is going to live in faith, driven by his dependence on the Holy Spirit as the man Jesus, in the same way that we must do.

This event symbolically showed Jesus’ anointing by the Spirit and His role as the promised King, signaling that God’s kingdom reign was drawing near and empowering Jesus for the mission. But, this ministry is not the ministry of the Son and the Holy Spirit alone, we see the third person of the divine trinity, God the Father is standing behind all of this.

The third thing we see happen when Jesus came out of the waters of baptism is a voice from heaven declaring, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased” (v. 17). This is one of the clearest depictions of the Triune God in the entire Bible. The Son is in the flesh, the Spirit is descending visibly from heaven in the form of a dove, and the Father is speaking from heaven.

The Father’s declaration that Jesus is “my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased” echoes Old Testament prophecies about the coming Messiah. For example, in Isaiah 42:1, God says, “Behold my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights; I have put my Spirit upon him; he will bring forth justice to the nations.” Once again, we see Jesus is the long-awaited Messiah who always pleases the Father.

The phrase beloved Son signifies a unique relationship between the Son and Father that differs from other father-son relationships. Unlike believers, who are God’s children by adoption, Jesus is God’s Son by nature, sharing the same divine essence. He is deeply loved by the Father and this relationship defines who he is.

And the Father is well pleased with him. The Father’s satisfaction in the Son highlights Jesus’ perfect obedience to the Father’s will. In John 4:34, Jesus says, “My food is

to do the will of him who sent me and to accomplish his work.” And in John 6:38–39, Jesus says, “For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me. And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me.”

And because of Jesus’ obedience, we can go back to the passage from Phil. 2 we read earlier and read the rest, the Father “has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Philippians 2:9–11). His choice to walk in full obedience brings joy to God’s heart.

Brothers and sisters, this affirmation doesn't just apply to Jesus. In Christ, through our faith in his finished work on our behalf, these words are also spoken over us. We are incorporated into his beloved status. And the Father is “well-pleased” with us, not because of what we have done or not done, but because of what Jesus has done for us, namely, by going to the cross in full obedience to the Father's will and paying the price of his precious blood to rescue and redeem us.

Jesus came to the Jordan river to be baptized to identify with those he came to save and to be commissioned to begin His ministry of establishing God's Kingdom on Earth, marking Him as the Messiah. Therefore, this baptism is more than just a historical event. It's a foundational statement about our faith. It teaches us that our God identifies with us in our brokenness. It teaches us that true life comes from living in obedience to God’s righteous purpose. And it teaches us that we serve a relational God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, who works together for our salvation and calls us into a loving relationship with Himself.

As you go from here today, remember your own identity in Christ. Remember that he stepped into the water for you. He fulfilled all righteousness for you. Rest in that love, walk in that righteousness, and live empowered by that same Spirit. Let us pray.

Benediction: “And now may the peace of God, which passes all understanding guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus; and the blessing of God Almighty, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, rest upon you and remain, now and always. Amen.” – Philippians 4:7