

## Get in Line

If you are anything like me, you hate lines. You get there early, trying to beat the rush and are disheartened when you see a ton of other people had the same idea, “Get in line, pal.”

In fact, I am not ashamed to say if we were going somewhere as a family and the line is too long, “Sorry everyone, we are doing something else! Can’t handle it.”

Which is why, of course, the worst feeling is when you want nothing more than to leave, but you can’t because you need something and there’s no other choice so you stand in that airport security line, or worse, the DMV. Ugh.

Yet even these lines have less dread in them than, I can only imagine, the long unemployment lines of the great depression, or the bread lines under some failing government policy. Imagine those lines, people waiting for hours and have no idea if there will be anything for them or their family at the end of it...

And so we stand in lines, so painful, for things we need, hoping to get them. And sometimes the despair and frustration boils over and we start pushing and prodding to get to the front, our need is so great! And sometimes that is silly, people fighting over black Friday deals, sometimes it is life altering – refugees battling over relief supplies. Lord, have mercy.

And so perhaps we who complain about the DMV can get some perspective, but that still doesn’t change the human nature of it all – we don’t like to wait in lines, even though, sometimes we have to.

Jesus in our text today is different. He gets in line for something he doesn’t need at all. He needs no forgiveness and has nothing to repent of as John the prophet makes clear.

Why would someone do that? I would never get in a line for something I don't need!

So why is he there? First, to share in the same things we do. We can confidently say that our Lord knows what it's like to stand with the unemployed wondering how they will make ends meet, he stands with them as a man who had no place to lay his head. He knows what it is like to hunger for bread, even as he will fast for 40 days after this. He knows what it is like to be shuffled around by bureaucracy and red tape as his family is sent to Bethlehem and back, then later, taken captive unjustly and dragged around to false trials. He knows what it is like to be caught in the middle of a tumultuous and angry political and worldview clash as one crowd shouts "Hosanna" and another "Crucify!" He knows what it's like to need healing, "If you are the Son of God come down from that cross." But he will not come down (praise God), he stays there bleeding out, suffocating, dying.

So many people in this broken world need healing, justice, freedom. So many people are waiting in lines for these things, "Can someone please at the Insurance Company, in the Court System, in the United Nations see us, help us!"

In the baptism of Jesus someone sees them, and goes to them, he steps in line with them.

And we might say, that is all well and good for him to be in solidarity with the hurting and downcast and so on, but does that really help them? And the answer to that depends, like the answer to so many other questions, on if this One going into the Waters is who He, and the Voice from Heaven, say He is. Because if not, he is just another person taking up a number at the DMV – "drop it, get out of the way, so I can get to the front sooner."

But if he has a Kingdom where we can drink from the water of life without payment, where all things are made new, where a Just Judge gives out vengeance and mercy perfectly, where the last are first, where they shall neither hunger nor thirst anymore...

Then yes, this does help even (and especially!) those at the back of the line who miss out on everything.

This is why Jesus can teach us in Matthew 6 “Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? 26 Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? 27 And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life?[g] 28 And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, 29 yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. 30 But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? 31 Therefore do not be anxious, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ 32 For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. 33 But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.”

All the things we get in line for, in Him and His righteousness, will be yours. Because with His righteousness comes a kingdom.

But where does one find this righteousness of Christ? What line do we get in?

“Surely, necessarily, one at a Church somewhere?” And we come to that Church how? Like the DMV with payment and papers showing how good we are? No, you know that isn’t it. We know we receive this by grace through faith.

And the text today bears this out.

Where was righteousness fulfilled? In a line of people with alms or money or their good works in tow? *Or in a line of people who were repentant (longing to admit and turn from their brokenness and sin) saying they didn’t have enough to offer and not enough good works!* This is a line for those who have lost their ID, lost their paperwork and had no money. This was a line of confessors. This was where righteousness was fulfilled!

And so we say things about how, if you want to be forgiven you have to be repentant. Which is true, but then we get in our heads trying to enumerate all the things we’ve done wrong, and our pride kicks in and says, “well, I wasn’t really wrong to do that was I? They deserved it!” And so on. And we can be left as a pharisee thinking, “Oh I’m fine everyone else is wrong.” Or we can be led to doubt, “Well, what if I am not as repentant as I ought to be? And I know that person isn’t because they still bear a grudge against me (and I TOTALLY don’t against them).” And so we worry about our repentance or judge other people’s repentance.

But wait, just wait... Was it the person in front of Jesus in line who’s repentance fulfilled all righteousness? The person behind him? Or was it Jesus’ repentance that fulfilled all righteousness? It is his! Not yours.

And this is great news, and this is the second reason he gets in that line. Precisely because we are not perfectly repentant, and so he must carry that too – he must be righteous in this for us as well. He must be the perfectly repentant One, because we are not.

And so may that be part of our confession! Let's be honest and confess that we aren't perfectly repentant. If grace was dependent on how well we are repentant, we'd have no certainty. And may that be one more reason to come to the One who we can be certain in: Jesus. And find in him the One who upholds even repentance for us and thus fulfills and supplies the very thing the people in that line, and we, need: righteousness before God.

This is why Jesus is the perfect sacrifice, the perfect scapegoat. On the day of atonement: Two goats were selected by lot: one was sacrificed to the Lord as a sin offering, while the other, designated as the scapegoat, was presented alive before the Lord. The high priest would lay his hands on the scapegoat and confess the sins of the Israelites on it.

This goat was then sent into the wilderness, carrying away the sins of the people, signifying their removal and purification. Jesus is both. The scapegoat, in the waters taking our sins and immediately after this he will go, just like the scapegoat, out into the wilderness! And, of course, we know he is the sacrifice. Perfect and spotless, yet on the cross, bleeding and paying the price for our forgiveness so that God is still just, but also so merciful.

This same Jesus is risen and has promises for us confessors. He promises that we have an ID a baptism which names you as His own. He promises that by grace through faith you have the righteousness of God, fulfilled, which, even if you are dying, means you have the Kingdom, eternal life and everything you need. Insurance, money, self help, all those might fall short, but Child of God, rest easy, you have everything you need.

No payment, no lines. He stands in line for you.

So as you wait in the many lines from the DMV to wherever, let us be thankful our Lord stands with us. And perhaps then, like those at the Jordan, you might find yourself standing and

speaking a confession or you might find yourself waiting in line to come the altar. Those are good lines to be in from time to time, not because we are perfect in them, but because Christ who stood and still stands with the sinners, is. God be praised. Amen.