

You Are My Child
Mark 1:4-11
January 14, 2018 – The Baptism of the Lord

Well, for the last six weeks we have concentrated on the baby Jesus, on the Holy Family, and most especially on Joseph's role as the earthly father of God's Son. Today we fast-forward about 28 years. Indeed, with the exception of those few verses in Luke about Jesus being lost in Jerusalem at the age of twelve and being found in the temple conversing with the elders, the Bible tells us nothing about Jesus from the time he was an infant until today's scripture when he was baptized by John in the River Jordan. There are some extra-canonical writings, stories of Jesus' childhood that are not in the Bible, but the authority of most of those is quite questionable. It's probably safe to assume, as we have for the last six weeks, that Jesus grew up in the carpenter's shop, working beside Joseph and eventually taking over the family business. And, as we have assumed for the last six weeks, it was Joseph, the righteous man, the good man, the model father, that formed the values and the character of Jesus. Indeed, as previously stated, I believe that just as God chose Mary to be the mother of the Christ, God also chose Joseph because of his virtue, to raise God's only Son.

But now the time has come. The time has come for Jesus to fulfill his call. For thirty years, Jesus has been shaped. He has been molded by his God-chosen parents, Mary and Joseph. He has been molded into what we might call "the perfect" Jew, or even the perfect human. And now the time has come. The time has come to go forth to tell the world, to show the world the love of God.

So Jesus comes to John, who is baptizing people in the River Jordan and preaching repentance and forgiveness of sins. What led Jesus to John, we're not really sure. The River Jordan is a fair hike from Nazareth. I think the Holy Spirit was at work again, giving Jesus that push. . . "Go see John, you have work to do." And so Jesus goes, and Jesus is baptized, and "just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him; and a voice came from heaven: 'You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.'" And that, for the perfectly righteous Jew, even for the Son of God, was a life changing experience.

Friends, I think it's no mistake that the temptation story immediately follows the baptism of Jesus. In Matthew and Luke, we get more details about the temptations, but Mark limits the temptations to two verses: "And the Spirit immediately [hear the word: the Spirit *immediately*] drove him into the wilderness. He was in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels waited on him."

Friends, if I had just had a baptismal experience like Jesus, I'd need to take time away, time to figure it all out, time to sort out the call; and I believe that's what the temptation stories of Jesus are all about. The ultimate temptation of Jesus was to ignore his call, to go back to the simple, safe, quiet life in the carpenter's shop. Forget about this Son of God stuff – it's too dangerous. That's the temptation - to continue business as usual. And so Jesus spent forty days processing what he experienced, trying to figure out what it all meant. And when the time was fulfilled, Jesus went forth to proclaim the Good News of God's amazing love for all people. And Jesus called others to go forth with him. It was the start of a ministry, a ministry that you and I continue to this day. And we continue that ministry, in part, because you and I are baptized by that same Holy Spirit; and you and I receive that same call – to go forth and proclaim the amazing love of God.

When Jesus was baptized, the words rang from heaven: “You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased.” I don't believe those are words just for Jesus. Those are words for each of us to hear as well. Hear them this day – You are my beloved son. You are my beloved daughter. How often do I tell our children, “God loves them.” How often do I preach that the gift of God's love is the greatest gift in the world; and it's the one gift that no one can ever take away.

“You are my beloved. With you I am well pleased.” That's the story of baptism. But with that story comes a call; and with that call comes a temptation. We already know the temptation. The temptation is to continue business as usual, to ignore the call. The call? I don't know what your call is. That's between you and God. In broad brushstrokes, I've already stated that call of every Christian is to spread the good news of the amazing love of God. The United Methodist Church has stated that its call is to “Make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.”

But how will you and I do that? How will you and I spread the Good News? Some of you may have ideas. Some of you may already have a sense of call, a call that you're acting on, or a call which you're not so sure about. To you I say, “Go for it! Resist the temptation to return to business as usual. To use biblical language I say, “Be not afraid, for God is with you.”

Others may have no idea if they are being called or to what they are being called. To you I say pray. Take time to listen to the Spirit; and follow where God leads. The call may be simple – make a few phone calls to those whom you have not heard from; visit a shut-in or someone who is struggling. Or the call may be more complicated – start a new ministry, volunteer for an important service organization, contribute to a worthy cause.

I tell you I believe all Christians have a call, and I believe that call extends right up until we take our last breath; because, even as we take our last breath, we

can share the love of God with those who surround us; and, to that I say, “Praise God.”

In a few moments, you will be asked to come forward for the renewal of baptism. When you came forward, I’ll place a drop of water on your forehead in the sign of the cross, and you’ll hear the words, “Remember your baptism and be thankful.” Indeed, in our baptisms, we are claimed as children of God – daughters and sons of the living God; and, in baptism, God expresses God’s pleasure with God’s family. And in baptism, God charges us to go forward to tell others of the Good News of God’s love; and to invite others to experience that amazing love.

Thanks be to God for the gift; and thanks be to God for the call to share that gift through our thoughts, through our words and through our deeds, that all of every nation, race and creed may know that God loves them.

Let us pray. . .

Holy Lord,
You call us your children,
and you call us to tell others of your love.
Give us the insight to discern your call for us,
and give us the courage to answer that call,
wherever that call may lead.
Amen.

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