January 7, 2018

Mark 1:4-11

Named and Claimed

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Mark 1:4-11 New Revised Standard Version

John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. And people from the whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem were going out to him, and were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins.  Now John was clothed with camel’s hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. He proclaimed, “The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the thong of his sandals. I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.”

In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan.  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.”

You may be wondering why our Christmas decorations are still up. Do you remember the Twelve Days of Christmas song? Yesterday, January 6, was Epiphany, the twelfth day of Christmas. Today we remember and celebrate two things. Epiphany when we remember and celebrate the coming of the magi or the wisemen bringing gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh for Jesus, and we also fast forward thirty years and remember and celebrate Jesus’ own baptism.

Baptism is something that Jesus did and he told us to do. Baptism is powerful. Baptism is when someone becomes a part of the Christian Church. They are initiated and incorporated into the body of Christ. We don’t think about it much, but for most of us, one thing that brings us to church on Sunday is the fact that we were baptized. Some of us were baptized without being given any choice in the matter. Some of us have never been baptized because we’ve never seen any reason why we should be.

I was baptized Easter Sunday when I was 6 months old. I don’t remember it, but I remember the story. My grandmother was sick with diabetes when I was born. She was in the hospital, but she was so excited and could not wait to see me. After about 6 months, she passed away and her funeral was on Holy Saturday at Sewickley Presbyterian Church in Pennsylvania. I was baptized the next day, on Easter Sunday, at the same place. Now, there was much discussion about the name that the pastor would say at my baptism. Apparently there was some worry that my mom would not be able to leave the hospital with me because I was nameless. My dad wanted to name me Cynthia Sumpter, but my mom was concerned that I would have a lisp. So, the compromise of Kerry Sumpter was made. When I was baptized, the pastor put water on my head and declared, “Kerry, I baptize you in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. At that moment my last name became that of Christ, the community acknowledged that I was a child of God. Kerry of Christ. In baptism we are named and claimed as a child of God.

Baptism is our ordination to ministry. If you haven’t been baptized in your life and you want to be, let me know. You don’t have to be baptized in a Methodist Church, your baptism in any Christian Church counts. God got it right the first time, but we may need to be reminded that our calling as Christians in our baptism is to pray, to witness to the good news of salvation in Christ, to care for and serve other people, and to work toward reconciliation, justice, and peace in the world. In your baptism you are a part of the priesthood of all believers. You are the church, Christ’s body, made visible in the world.

After my baptism, my family gathered around me and laid hands on me as the pastor prayed, “The Holy Spirit work within you, that being born through water and the Spirit, you may be a faithful disciple of Jesus Christ. Amen.” We are already in that relationship with God, but we are continually reformed through the Holy Spirit.

Your baptism may be something that you don’t give a lot of thought about. I hope that today you can hear the words that God says to Jesus and also to us. You are my beloved child. With you I am well pleased. May you hear today that you are accepted, you are loved, you are pleasing to God. In baptism we receive God’s grace as a gift, we are recipients of God’s blessing and love. We are God’s beloved children because of who God is, God loves us and wants nothing more than to see us flourish. In baptism God chooses us. God says we are enough. We are pleasing to God and loved. And God never lets us go.

The other day I was in a funk. It was January 2 and nothing had changed. Life was still stressful and I was worried about the economy and our divided government, our polarized world, wars and rumors of wars. I was worried about my family and my parents and getting older. Someone from the church texted me and I started to pray for that person and I felt this peace come over me and this reminder that God is on our side. God is with us through everything. God walks alongside us, giving us strength, encouraging us, filling us with grace and love so that we can be the people God calls us to be.[[1]](#footnote-2)

Life may not be as you want it to be right now. You may wish that a lot of things in your life were different. God is with you. God loves you. God created us good, but we listen to other voices that shout that we are worthless and unlovable. We run after any experience that will ease our longing. We look for anyone who will welcome us. We long for a love that has already been given to us by God. We are chosen and loved by God. We have our identity given in the waters of baptism. We have our lives renewed by God’s holy Word and by the gifts of creation. We have a joy that is unending, and we are embraced in a love that lasts through eternity. We are named and claimed. Thanks be to God. Amen.

1. http://www.davidlose.net/2018/01/epiphany-1-b-powerful-words-for-a-new-year/ [↑](#footnote-ref-2)