

Remember Who You Are
Luke 3:15-17, 21-22
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Baptism of the Lord Sunday

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When I was in high school, on weekends, as I left the house, my Dad would bid me farewell with the same words. Each time I walked out the door to go out with the guys or to go on a date, he would send me off with these weighty words, “Son, remember who you are.” (Note: Several of you told me after worship that one of your parents told you similar but not identical words as you left the house! So too did William Willimon in the source listed following this sermon.)

You know what my Dad meant. He didn’t mean he was concerned about me developing temporary amnesia and forgetting my name or failing to recall that I lived at 122 Fairfax Drive. Rather, he was concerned that in my words and actions I not forget who I was, my upbringing, my values, my good family name.

“Remember who you are” was his paternal benediction every evening I left the house. And it was also his paternal benediction when I moved away from home for good, “Son, remember who you are.”

Truth is, points out the minister William Willimon, “it is sometimes difficult in modern life, amidst the conflicting claims and confusion of names, to *remember* who we are. We often answer to some false name, forever misunderstanding who we are and by whom we are named. It is easy to forget.”

“Who am I?” often asked by youth, is a pressing question not only for them but for many adults as well. The quest for one’s true self, the search for one’s identity consumes much more than just our teenage years. In our day there are many causes, groups, and philosophies that are more than willing and ready to tell us who we are.

Who am I?

“You are mostly maker and spender of money, capitalist, doer, producer, obtainer of cars with sun roofs, leather seats, and loud stereos, paying off your fifteen or thirty year mortgages on homes with two or three car garages. Seek affluence.” That’s what the advertisers and sales people tell us.

Who am I?

“You are mostly a sexual being,” the movies, television, and songs tell us.

Who am I?

“You are an autonomous, self-made being,” this modern, secular, power-craving world tells us. “Nobody will look out for you but you. You are the most important project in your life; nurture and love yourself. Look out for number one as you seek power and influence.” Last week’s sermon by Chip rightly called some of these our idols.

But to the important, “Who am I?” question, the Church, the Christian faith, has traditionally responded, “You are baptized.” You are someone to whom a name is given.”

At baptism we are given the name “Christian.” That name, whenever it is given, is a gift – unearned, unmerited, undeserved – like salvation itself – a gift from God.

In so doing, the church makes a radically different statement about who we are and how we get to be who we are. We are telling the baptized person that his or her identity is a gift, something bestowed upon you by God’s grace – remembering not just who we are but *whose* we are – a child of God. So at baptism we receive a spiritual name – Christian – follower of Jesus Christ.

There is a true story that a Presbyterian pastor tells about one of those embarrassing moments in ministry. He was in the middle of performing a wedding ceremony, just about to lead the couple through their vows, when, all of a sudden, he forgot the name of the groom. Trying to cover the awkward moment, the pastor asked the groom with great solemnity, “With what name were you baptized?” The groom, a bit taken aback, paused. After all, this wasn’t in the rehearsal! But then with great confidence, he responded, “I was baptized with the name of our Lord Jesus Christ!” This didn’t help the pastor at all, but at least this groom understood the meaning of baptism! (Story cited by Marj Carpenter)

The minister Susan Andrews points out that what is most important about our Scripture lesson, the story of Jesus’ baptism, is how it ends. “Quite simply God is delighted!”

“God’s voice is warm and welcoming. ‘You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.’ ...Even before Jesus has done anything

noteworthy or worthwhile God praises him. God affirms that Jesus is precious, that he is unique, that he is loved – not for what he does but for who he is. In this baptism scene, God echoes the divine delight and pleasure that was expressed in the very beginning days of creation.”

After the creation of the light and the dark, the stars and sun and moon, God said, “It is good.” God said the same after each following day of creation. And after the creation of man and woman in God’s image, looking out over all of creation, God said, “It is *very* good.”

“After the baptism of Jesus, after this total immersion into the human condition, God says, ‘This is good. This is delightful. This is the Beloved, who brings me great pleasure. This is very good.’ So it is with each one of us when we are baptized. We too are blessed as the Beloved. We too bring pleasure to God.” (Susan Andrews) We too are known as children of God.

We sin, of course. We do the things we ought not to do and don’t do the things we ought. Our sin is troubling not only for how it hurts others and God, but because we know we were made for something better. Our sin is noteworthy, our inhumanity an affront to God because it does not befit the character of ones so worthy! After all, we are *children of God*. Worthy because we have been made worthy- adopted as one of God’s own.

Friends, today we renew our baptismal vows. We will come forward to the baptismal font or bowls to remember our baptism and to recognize that we are loved – set apart as God’s beloved to become love in the world.

Each one of us is to be reminded of our original blessing – the waters of baptism that have washed over our lives and each one of us is to be reminded of God’s Voice in our lives. You are my child, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased. Remember your baptism, my friends. Remember that you are beloved. And remember that it is a gracious God that has taken delight and pleasure in who you are and who you are becoming.

Back in 1976, America’s bicentennial year, a very creative writer came up with an intriguing idea. “Our nation is 200 years old,” he thought. “I bet I can find someone who is alive today who is old enough that when they were a child, they remember someone who was then old enough to have been alive at the founding of the nation, a living link to the beginning of the country.” And, sure enough, he found such a person. He was a Kentucky farmer named Burnham Ledford, who was over 100 years old in 1976; and he remembered when he was a little boy being taken by a wagon to see his great-great grandmother who was then over 100 herself and who was a little girl when George Washington was inaugurated as the first American president.

When the writer asked Burnham what he remembered, he said he remembered being taken into his great-great grandmother’s house. She was feeble. She was blind. She was sitting in an old chair in the corner of a dark bedroom. “We brought Burnham to see you,” his father said. The old woman turned toward the sound and reached out with long, bony fingers and said in an ancient, cracking voice, “Bring him here.”

“They had to push me toward her,” Burnham remembers. “I was scared to death of her. But when I got close to her, she reached out her hands and began to stroke my face. She felt my eyes and my nose, my mouth and my chin. And all at once, she seemed to be satisfied, and she pulled me close to her and held me tight. ‘This boy’s a Ledford,’ she said, ‘I can feel it. I know this boy. He’s one of us.’” (Story cited by Tom Long)

Friends, in an even deeper way that’s the promise Jesus hears at his baptism – He is beloved by God, and through Jesus Christ we hear that same promise. When we are baptized, God holds us close and says, “I know this one. I called this one by name. This one belongs to me.”

Yes, to one and to all of us, God says, “You are a child of mine. You are a child of God. You are Christian. You are loved.”

So, my friends, in light of all this, let me close with my Dad’s words, “Remember who you are!!” Amen and amen!

Sources

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