

“It’s the Name”
Jan. 8, 2017 – Baptism of the Lord

Isaiah 42:1-9

42:1 Here is 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. 42:2 He will not cry or lift up his voice, or make it heard in the street; 42:3 a bruised reed he will not break, and a dimly burning wick he will not quench; he will faithfully bring forth justice. 42:4 He will not grow faint or be crushed until he has established justice in the earth; and the coastlands wait for his teaching. 42:5 Thus says God, the LORD, who created the heavens and stretched them out, who spread out the earth and what comes from it, who gives breath to the people upon it and spirit to those who walk in it: 42:6 I am the LORD, I have called you in righteousness, I have taken you by the hand and kept you; I have given you as a covenant to the people, a light to the nations, 42:7 to open the eyes that are blind, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon, from the prison those who sit in darkness. 42:8 I am the LORD, that is my name; my glory I give to no other, nor my praise to idols. 42:9 See, the former things have come to pass, and new things I now declare; before they spring forth, I tell you of them.

Acts 10:34-43

10:34 Then Peter began to speak to them: "I truly understand that God shows no partiality, 10:35 but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him. 10:36 You know the message he sent to the people of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ--he is Lord of all. 10:37 That message spread throughout Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John announced: 10:38 how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power; how he went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him. 10:39 We are witnesses to all that he did both in Judea and in Jerusalem. They put him to death by hanging him on a tree; 10:40 but God raised him on the third day and allowed him to appear, 10:41 not to all the people but to us who were chosen by God as witnesses, and who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. 10:42 He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one ordained by God as judge of the living and the dead. 10:43 All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name."

Matthew 3:13-17

3:13 Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan, to be baptized by him. 3:14 John would have prevented him, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?" 3:15 But Jesus answered him, "Let it be so now; for it is proper for us in this way to fulfill all righteousness." Then he consented. 3:16 And when Jesus had been baptized, just as he came up from the water, suddenly the heavens were opened to him and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him. 3:17 And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased."

We have all sorts of ways of showing it. When you've been together for a long time, it doesn't take much more than a telling glance, a look... A mom holds a new born so close that the casual observer would fear that the child will be smothered. While sitting together in the pew a Dad will reach around the back of his wife and play with a ringlet of hair on the head of his 10 year old daughter. In the movies, sweaty palms find each other as the pre-adolescents overcome a lifetime fear of some kind of contamination from the opposite gender and they hold hands. The young wife stands with hands on hips, a mock look of disapproval on her face until her young husband retraces his steps and kisses her goodbye before going to work. Sweet Aunt Harriet pinches the cheeks of the chubby 8 year old and pronounces him 'cute as a button' much to his embarrassment. In their senior year of college at the spring sweetheart dance he, mesmerized by her, finds himself uttering words he did not know his heart could either contain, nor produce – I love you.

We human beings have all sorts of ways of telling those important to us that they are – important to us. The expressions of our hearts, which let the other know of their value are a blessed means of sharing our lives and our love.

There is nothing quite like the feeling that you are beloved by another person. That, that person would give anything for you. Do anything for you. That there is no limit to the care that person would offer on your behalf.

To be beloved also means to be taken seriously. To be considered of such value as to be treasured. To be considered worthy. To be the subject of another's constant care and concern. And again, we have all sorts of ways of showing our love. Sometimes subtle, sometimes not.

We, in our living, need to hear from the God who names us and claims us, "I am the LORD, I have called you in righteousness, I have taken you by the hand and kept you." You are mine.

We want to know who and whose we are. The truth is that the identity question of "Who am I?" is never over and done. We all, from time to time, wonder anew about who we are. All of us. Our culture thrives on the question with a proliferation of answers that promise to meet our needs and give us the answer in ways as diverse as meditation to the new ability to test our DNA and really discover who we are and from whence we come. We try our best to fit who we are into the morass of human existence over against the promises of God.

We don't know why, except for the fact that it was God's own good time, that Jesus waited until 30 to make this trek down to see his cousin John who was standing in all of his eccentric finery in the Jordan. We just know that he came. And when he came, John knows who he is immediately. There's no report in scripture that Jesus was trying to figure out who he was. We assume that he knew all along, like he did when he was twelve coming from the

temple and speaking of being 'in my father's house.' We assume that he knew who he was and when the time was right for the whole world to know as well.

Finally, there he is, standing up on the bank of the Jordan and he comes down to John ready to be baptized and naturally, naturally, Matthew tells us, John would have prevented him, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?" But Jesus answered him, "Let it be so now; for it is proper for us in this way to fulfill all righteousness." So John, you will recall, who has already said he isn't worthy to tie Jesus' sandals, baptizes. And then, what happens next is of course where all this is heading. Matthew says, "And when Jesus had been baptized, just as he came up from the water, suddenly the heavens were opened to him and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased."

This is it. This is the moment. All of the speculation of all the people. All the pondering of Mary, all the wondering of the family, even any possible self introspection and wonder of Jesus himself is cleared up in this moment. He gets from God above, from Parent to Holy son, a name. He is The Beloved. And God is delighted with him. In this moment of water pouring and cleansing and dove descending Jesus is both baptized, and ordained, chosen by God officially and publicly.

Since that time, to pressing and sometimes vexing questions of identity, of "Who am I?" questions, the church has traditionally given this answer, "You are a child of God, You are baptized." You are claimed by God, proclaimed by parents and/or loved ones, recognized and promised for by a church of God's people, and given a name. If we are trying to figure out who we are at any point in our lives maybe the best thing to do is to come to the baptismal font and look into those grace filled waters. It may take a while but the reflection of yourself that you see there is who you really are.

"Who am I?" "You are someone to whom a name is given." "What is the name given to this child?" the minister traditionally asks when a child is brought to the baptismal font. In baptism we are claiming God's blessings for a lifetime and bestowing the Christian name, as opposed to the child's family name, upon the child by the church. _____ I baptize you in the name of the Creator, Son and H.S. You may find it amazing that even in the civil courts of today a Baptismal certificate is accepted as proof of a name given. There were times when the first time a child's name was publicly pronounced was at the child's baptism.

Whether one's name is actually given in the rite of baptism or not, baptism still continues to be an occasion for naming. At baptism we are given the name "Christian." We are declared to be members of the community of the saints, the faithful household of God, the church. We are, in other words,

engrafted into God's family, and as Paul says, we become fellow heirs with Christ. We share Jesus heritage. We share, therefore Jesus name as well. The beloved.

Becoming a Christian, getting that name at whatever age it is given, is a gift, unearned, unmerited, undeserved, like salvation itself. In so doing, the church makes a radically different statement about who we are and how we get to be who we are than does our culture. We are telling the baptized that his or her identity is a gift, a corporate endowment of the church, something bestowed by grace. Like the forgiveness and grace of God we can never earn it, we will never deserve it, but it is ours, and it is who we are.

We are Baptized for this: The Christian message is not that we should try hard to act like somebody. The Christian message is simply, "We are somebody." We are the church. And as the church, the body of Christ, we have a calling to fulfill – to feed the hungry in spirit and stomach, to heal the hurt and the harmed, to clothe the saddened with a blanket of care and the naked with the garments of peace, to free the oppressed of mind and heart with love and kindness and the oppressed of self with a demand for justice and righteousness.

So, in spite of what it is like in the world with all of its doubt and despair, enmity and anxiety, violence and victimization, here in this place as we echo again words spoken down at the Jordan, and here by the font, God's voice quietly whispers to us, "You are my beloved child. In you, I am well pleased."