

Whose Am I?

January 10, 2021, Baptism of the Lord

Gospel of Mark 1:7-11

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The Gospels, though often challenging in its message, are ultimately geared toward Good News. That's what the word Gospel means.

The reason we take time to reflect on the Gospels is to nurture within us, **our identity as God's children**, a message we do not obtain from the world. The Gospel message has a source from above, a higher place, a place that is deeper, more profound and completely trustworthy. The message teaches us and has the power to affect us to the very core of our being.

Yet the message has a tough time getting through to us in our world because of sin. Sin is the rejection of the truth of our humanity. Its effect is to muddle up our sense of our identity and who we really belong to.

Genesis teaches us that God created human beings in his own image and likeness and it **was very good**.

It reaffirms humanity is good. But how did we get off this path of not recognizing that in the first place?

It has been suggested that the sin to which Adam and Eve fell into was the sin of temptation **to disbelieve the Good News** and refuse to accept our inner goodness and the goodness of others – Instead, they thought they must **do something else** to become like God or **become** valuable in God's eyes. They chose to not fully accept and fully trust their need for God and their innate goodness as his creation.

They did not take seriously or could not see that they were just fine in God's eye without having to take matters into their own hands. From that choice forward, the legacy for humanity has been to struggle with accepting that we belong to God and that we are the beloved of God. Our identity was then clouded. Another voice had crept into the mix - - into the human mind and heart, a voice of doubt, fear and distrust. The negative voice that causes us to cower in unhealthy fear before God – to conceal and hide our true selves from God, others, and even ourselves. We came to hide our weaknesses and our vulnerabilities out of pride and fear. There are qualities about ourselves that God knows about and loves but we have come to feel ashamed of.

Voice of Self Deprecation

We experience the effects of this voice when we say to ourselves, what good are my efforts, they don't count for anything significant compared to others. Why do I bother praying, God is not really answering my prayers anyway? All my work is for nothing. When we say, God doesn't love me, or there is no God, when our thoughts take us to dark places of low self esteem, perhaps because of loneliness, isolation or maybe a lost relationship, we may be tempted to question the purpose or value of it all. Or maybe we feel we messed up so bad God could never forgive us. In those times we are losing sight of reality that each of us is 'the beloved of God'. **It is us in our weakened human state that we are susceptible to falling into that false thinking that we are not good enough, but that's not God.**

Voice of Pride and Arrogance

That voice may give us the opposite message: 'my efforts count for more than anybody else's and others are below me'. Or, 'I don't need God, I've got it figured out for myself'. Again it is our weakened prideful state that brings on that belief about ourselves.

Voice of Impatience and Impulse and thus Force

There is a part of us - that voice within us that wants answers and solutions now, that part of us that is tempted to take things by force.

We succumb to this when we short circuit a discussion and turn it into an argument; when we insist on talking instead of listening, when we assume God isn't listening, when we try resolving conflict or disagreement by imposing our will on others.

Recently, we celebrated the birth of Jesus, the incarnation of God into the world - - an event that permanently transformed our human condition. And through His baptism, Jesus demonstrates a **radical solidarity** with our human condition, a further transformation of our human condition.

He is the personification of the **covenant between God and humanity** by virtue of being **both in one person**. He restores the true dignity of our humanity and teaches us how to be truly human because in our weakened sinful state, our humanity is deeply wounded and barely human.

In Christ, that relationship will eventually bring about the reign of God – which will not come about by militant force but by non-violent means.

*He will not cry or lift up His voice, or make it heard in the street;
A bruised reed he will not break. And a dimly burning wick he will not quench;
He will faithfully bring forth justice.*

The world (and that unhealthy inner voice that's not of God) tries to tell us what we need and vainly attempts to satisfy our inner hunger with food that doesn't ultimately satisfy. In our impulsiveness, we sometimes settle for what is offered here.

He will faithfully bring about justice - - but not by force and not on our schedule.

Jesus' utter acceptance of our humanity, through His baptism, his drinking of the cup, his sharing of our wounded condition reverses our sinful rejection of our creatureliness.

He came into the world to teach us the will of the Father who has our ultimate best interest at heart - - as God has had from the very beginning.

We have strayed in different ways and He desires for us to return to Him, to the original plan of fulfillment and ultimate joy, which are only possible through Him who came into the world to restore us to a path of life we were created for in the first place. Yet, He does not force that will on anyone.

It is up to each one of us to come to that ourselves, to accept instruction, pray to the Father and realize the covenant still applies. Our God will not let us down if we turn to Him for help through our complete surrender.

In Jesus' baptism, our Lord radically identifies Himself with all humanity and invites us to see ourselves in a new light, with clarity, free of the lies and untruths about ourselves, about others and of even questioning whether or not God loves us. The message to each one of us today is **we are the beloved**. With this in our hearts, may we respond in kind. The question is, what voice are we going to believe.

May our coming up out of the waters of freedom be the beginning of our listening to **who He says we are**. What better place to turn than to the One who created us and who knows us inside and out. Amen.