

January 12, 2020

“A Child of God”

John Wesley United Methodist Church

Mark 1:1-11

Rev. Rebecca Mincieli, 508-548-3050

Wait a second. Weren't we just celebrating Jesus birth? Jesus as a baby. Now suddenly, in today's Scripture, he's like 30 years old. Did we all miss something? Well, actually no. Because remember I said a couple of weeks ago that the whole reason for Christmas was Easter. The whole purpose for Jesus' birth in Bethlehem, was ultimately his death in Jerusalem. Where he died to forgive us of our sins, and assure us of our eternal salvation. Well, Jesus' journey to Jerusalem effectively starts today, when he leaves Nazareth to be baptized in the Jordan and begin his ministry here on earth.

Now the next three years of his life we're all very familiar with. The calling of the disciples, the teachings and the miracles, the confrontations with the Pharisees, and finally, his great sacrifice on the cross. But don't you wonder sometimes about those hidden years of Jesus. Those years as a child, as a teenager, as a young man? I do! I love the Scriptures, but like I've always said, the one complaint I have with the Gospel writers is that they don't give enough information, enough detail. Maybe if they knew how to "tweet" back then we might know more, but basically all we get from those hidden years is this: Jesus was born, then Mary and Joseph take him to be circumcised, and then the whole family flees and become refugees in Egypt. At some point they come back and take up residence in Nazareth where Jesus works with his earthly father, Joseph, and becomes a carpenter. We also hear a tale about Jesus as a boy teaching in the temple, and how he awed all those listening with his wisdom and insight about God. But after that nothing. Yet those hidden years have intrigued Biblical scholars, historians, writers and poets through the ages. So I thought today I might share with you a poem entitled *The Nazareth Shop* by Robert McIntyre, imagining a time and place where Jesus worked as a master carpenter.

*I wish I had been his apprentice, to see him each morning at seven; to see him at work and to learn from him, the master of earth and heaven.*

*Some wish they had been on Mount Tabor, to hearken to his high speech; when Moses and Elijah were beside him, he holding communion with each.*

*Some wish they had heard his soft accents that stilled many a sweet baby's alarms; ot when he bid small children from their mothers, and folded them fast in his arms.*

*Some wish they had stood by the Jordan when John greeted him there; and seen the white dove of the Spirit, fly down o'er the path of his prayer.*

*Some wish they had seen the Redeemer when into the basin he poured, the water, and, girt with a towel, the servant of all, was the Lord.*

*But for me, if I had the choosing, O this would them all overtop: to work all day steady beside him, there in his Nazareth shop.*

*To hear him say softly to me, "My helper, now bring me the level and rule;" to have him bend over and teach me, the use of the artisan's tools.*

*To hear him say, "This is a sheep's gate, to keep in the wandering flock;" or, "This is a stout oaken house door, I made it to rest on a rock."*

*And then sometimes his mother, in the day's greatest heat; would bring us our meal, and bid us sit down to rest and to eat.*

*Then with both of us silent before him, the blessed Messiah would stop; to say grace to his Father, as their consummate glory, filled the Nazareth shop.*

Yes, just imagine what a wonderful carpenter he must have been.

But that's enough musing for now. Let's get back to the meat of today's Scripture. "At that time Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. Just as Jesus was coming up out of the water, he saw heaven being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased." Now I love this verse for two reasons. First, because those are words I long to hear God say to me. "You are my daughter, whom I love; with you I am well pleased." And I'm sure all of you want to hear the same thing. But secondly, and more importantly, because I think it's the only place in the Bible where the entire Trinity appear together. Consider the passage again. The Son stands in the river, the Spirit descends like a dove, and the Father speaks from heaven. And that passage alone shows just how important, how vitally important, the sacrament of baptism is to each and every one of us.

You see, baptism is more than just symbolism. Baptism marks us as a child of God, and that denotes a special connection to the God of all creation. The God of love and peace. The God who's goodness stands against the evil forces of this world. Think about it. We are born into a dysfunctional world. I don't have to prove that to you, you know this is true, and, to be honest, it's been that way forever. And good Christians try to change the dysfunction that exists out there by doing the right thing, by fighting injustices, by being morally honest, by following that Golden rule. Now that's not to say that atheists, or nonbelievers, or Jews, or Muslims, don't want to do the same thing. But the difference is that through

our baptism, we Christians claim that connection to God. We claim it because the very same Holy Spirit that came down and filled the life of Jesus in the Jordan and then guided him in his godly ministry, is the very same Holy Spirit that fills us at our baptism and guides us in godly living. That's important, so let me repeat it. The very same Holy Spirit that came down and filled the life of Jesus in the Jordan, is the very same Holy Spirit that fills us at our baptism. And that then marks us as a son of God, a daughter of God, a child of God.

You know, Jesus said that to enter the kingdom of God, we must be born of water and the Spirit. And so at baptism we are sprinkled with or immersed in water because of what water represents. Water is life giving, it cleanses us, and just as Christ came up out of the water into new life, so we are raised up into new life with Christ. At the heart of it all, it is at our baptism that God expresses His great love for us. A love that was from the very beginning when "God created humankind in His own image. In the image of God He created them." In the Psalms David says, "You knew me when I was in my mother's womb." God told the prophet Jeremiah, "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you." And Jesus gives us an even deeper, more intimate understanding of that love and who we are in relation to God when he calls God "Abba," an Aramaic word that to us is like saying, "Daddy." "Daddy!" How beautiful a relationship that implies!

Let me end with a story that illustrates how significant it is for us to claim our identity as a child of God. Well known preacher and professor, Fred Craddock tells of the time he and his wife were vacationing in the Smokey Mountains of Tennessee. One morning they were eating breakfast in a little restaurant, just enjoying the time together. While waiting for their food, they noticed a distinguished looking, white haired, man moving from table to table, visiting with all the guests. Well, Craddock leans over and whispers to his wife, "I hope he doesn't come over here and bother us." But sure enough, the man came to their table. "Where are you folks from?" he asked in a friendly voice. "Oklahoma," they answered. "Great to have you here in Tennessee," the stranger said. "What do you do for a living?" "I teach homiletics at a seminary," Craddock replied. "Homiletics. Oh, so you teach preachers how to preach, do you? Well, I've got a story for you." And with that, the gentleman pulled up a chair and sat down. Craddock groaned and thought to himself, "Great. Just what I need on my vacation!" The man started, "See that mountain over there?" He pointed out the restaurant window. "Not far from the base of that mountain, in a small town, there was a boy born to an unwed mother." As you all know, back then, there was a real stigma attached to a child born out of wedlock. The man continued, "'Bastard boy' he

was called. Bastard boy! And he had a hard time growing up in that little town because every place he went, he was always teased and asked the same question: 'Hey, boy, who's your daddy?' At school, in the grocery store, drug store, wherever, people would ask the same question: 'Who's your daddy? Who's your daddy?' He would hide at recess and lunch time from other students. He would avoid going into stores because that question hurt him so bad. When he was twelve years old, a new preacher came to the local church. And this boy would go out of his way to avoid the preacher and hearing the inevitable question, 'Who's your daddy?' But one day, the new preacher said the benediction and got to the door before the boy could slip out. Sure enough, not knowing anything about the boy, the preacher put his hand on his shoulder and said, "Hello son. Now tell me, who's your daddy?" Everyone who heard got deathly quiet. The boy could feel every eye staring at him. Now everyone would finally hear out loud the answer to the question, 'Who's your daddy?' (No one, no one sir, I'm just a bastard boy, he thought to himself.) The new preacher though, sensed the situation, and using the discernment that only the Holy Spirit could give, said the following to the frightened little boy: "Wait a minute! I know who you are. I see the family resemblance now. You are a child of God. You are child of God." With that, he patted the boy on his shoulder and said, "Son, you've got a great inheritance – now go and claim it." With that, the boy smiled for the first time in a long time and walked out the door a changed person. He was never the same again. Whenever anybody asked him, 'Who's your daddy?' he'd just tell them, 'I'm a child of God.' 'I'm a child of God.'" At that, the distinguished gentleman got up from the table and said, "Now aren't you glad you listened to my story?" Craddock sheepishly agreed. Then, as the man turned to leave, he said, "You know, if that new preacher hadn't told me that I was one of God's children, I probably would never have amounted to anything at all No, nothing at all!" And he walked away. Craddock and his wife were stunned. He called the waitress over and asked, "Do you know that man who was just sitting at our table?" The waitress grinned and said, "Of course. Everybody in Tennessee knows him. That's Governor Ben Hooper. "

You too are a child of God. And today, like we do every year, we are going to remember our baptism. To celebrate your place in God's heart. To hear God's voice saying to you, "You are my son, my daughter, whom I love. In you I am well pleased." So that you too can claim your inheritance. Amen.