

**Sermon on Mark 1:4-11    January 7/8, 2012    Baptism of our Lord**

Grace and peace to you all from our God and Father and from our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

What does God think of you and what does baptism have to do with it? Let those two questions rattle around in your brain for a while. I'll be coming back to it in a bit.

There really never is a time in our lives where we don't wonder what other people think about us. When we're little, we wonder what our family, what our parents think about us. After getting in trouble we ask our parents, "Well, do you still love me?" When we get older and get into middle school or high school we wonder what to other people think about us. Forget what our parents think about us, what really matters is what our friends or classmates think about us. And I'm sure we've asked ourselves things like, "Am I "cool" enough? Am I wearing the right kind of clothes to fit in? Should I really hang out with so-and-so because you know who thinks this and that about them!?" Or maybe you ask your friend: "How do I smell? Because you know I want to impress this person so they like me and ask me to the dance." Don't laugh, I remember going into the bathroom closet when I was little so that I could douse myself with my dad's cologne (or was it his aftershave?) because I knew that there was this one girl who thought I was cute.

Or we can look at high school life and see that everyone is competing with everyone and that the only really important thing is how important you are and if you aren't important, then you do or say whatever you can so that you'll be accepted, or liked, even if the people you are with are as fake and phony as the way you're acting. When I was in high school, if you were one of the popular kids you hung out with and did stuff other popular kids did and more importantly, you

didn't do stuff or hang out with kids who weren't like you, or if you were one of the kids who dressed all in black and thought of yourself as Gothic, you did whatever you could to stay with that crowd even if it meant doing the same exact things that you hated and despised about the other groups or cliques, or add whatever group here and the same thing goes.

But even as adults we still are really self-conscious, just like we were 10 or 20 or 30 or 40 years ago; some of us more than others of course, and some of us will admit to that more than others too, but we're all self-conscious, except at whatever stage of life you're in, it's just different things now. Some of us might worry about what others think about our kids or grandkids. Some of us might worry about what others think because we've been divorced, or because we're a single parent, or because we've made some really bad choices in life. Some of us might worry about what others think because even though we used to find happiness or escape life at the bottom of a bottle or some other sort of drug or something that's addictive or destructive, will other people see the new me? The real me?

The fact remains for all people, regardless of age – We often define ourselves or carve out an identity for ourselves by what other people say about us and also by what we think we are or should be. If someone tells you that you're good for nothing all your life, chances are that's how you'll look at yourself. If someone tells you that you won't amount to much because you're stupid, chances are you'll believe if you hear it enough. But notice Who is missing in **all** of this: God. What does God have to say about you? As people of the Way, that should be what we want to hear when everyone else tells us differently. The very fact that you are all here today tells me that you want to hear something different than what you hear anywhere else. The very

fact that you are all here today tells me that that you want to hear and know what God thinks of you, people he has claimed and chosen as his own through the Word and water of baptism.

In our Gospel reading from Mark we see what God has to say to Jesus after he was baptized.

With a **booming** voice from the heavens above we hear God say to Jesus, “You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.” Now, did Jesus do anything to earn being called beloved? No. Was the God the Father pleased with His Son because Jesus had done so many things, earned so many rewards, won all sorts of trophies? No. Simply because Jesus was His Son, was Jesus called beloved. Simply because Jesus was His Son, was God well pleased with him.

And this is what baptism is for you too. Because you have been baptized, chosen, claimed, you are beloved by God. You are a beloved child of God not because of anything you have done, but simply because you belong to God now. Because you’ve been baptized you can completely forget every single thing you thought about yourself, you can forget every single thing that other people say about you, because in the end (and beginning!) the only thing that matters is what God has to say about you. But how often do we forget and neglect that about baptism. Baptism is often looked at as something trivial, as something insignificant, as something that really isn’t that important. It’s looked at as if the only thing it does is make you a member of Christ’s church. Or it’s looked at like something we do to make a grandma or a grandpa happy. And that’s it. But this might be one of the biggest issues we have in today’s church; that no one really understands the significance and the power and the promise of baptism. And we could pass the blame around and point fingers at parents and God parents who promised to raise a child in the one true Faith but didn’t or don’t. We could point fingers at other denominations that treat

baptism as something trivial or unimportant. We could point our fingers at churches and pastors for not properly teaching about baptism. There's enough blame to go around for everyone. But as any couple knows, playing the blame game doesn't do anything at all except make more enemies and destroy relationships. So what we need to do is recapture the importance and power of baptism because like I said earlier, in baptism we find that despite what this broken world says about us or what we say or think about ourselves, God says something totally different and new to us in baptism: That we are beloved, we are loved, that we are chosen, that come what may, trials, tribulations, temptations, or even the devil himself whispering in our ear – we know and can trust in what God promises and says to us in baptism because God cannot and does not lie.

So why is baptism important, even for us who may have been baptized years and years ago?

Baptism is important for 5 main reasons. I could list more, but I'll keep this short since we're getting on in time. (1) God baptized you through the mouth and the hands of a preacher and because God baptized you and claimed you as His own, and because of that you have no right to tell God that you aren't good enough or holy enough or that you deserve to have a merciful and loving God. Because baptism is God's work and not yours, you can trust that God didn't make a mistake choosing and adopting you as his own. (2) If someone comes up to you and says, "Well, if you were baptized as a baby, that doesn't really count, you didn't have any say in the matter." Then you tell this person: "Just because I didn't have any say in the matter makes no difference. Actually, if it was up to me, I probably would have rejected this precious gift because it looks so insignificant in your eyes and in the eyes of the world. But this is precisely why I will always cling to my baptism because it was God choosing me, not me choosing God. God made me his own before I was worthy, before I had done anything. (3) When you were baptized, God chose to love you specifically. God doesn't love people in general, God loves people specifically. I

can wake up every day and say that I love my family, but until I actually say to my wife, or my daughter, or God willing baby-Johnson-to-be, that “I love you Ella, or Heather, or baby Johnson” (I can’t say the name now because that’s a point of discussion with me and Heather right now), then can they know that I mean them. So in baptism God specifically said to you, “You are all mine and no one else can have you; not sin, not death, not the devil, only Me. I am yours and you are Mine.” (4) Because you’ve been baptized, if things in your life are full of chaos or full of despair, you have every right to say to God, “God you promised me better than this!” You have every right to beg, and plead, and pester, and cry out to this God of ours to see you through anything. (5) Because you’ve been baptized, if someone tells you or if you tell yourself that you’re not good enough, or smart enough, or holy enough, or that you’re an awful person, you say to them or yourself, “You may be right about some of that stuff, but my God says something different than that. My God says I belong to him and because I belong to Him, because I have been baptized, I am perfect and pure in His eyes. All that is rotten and imperfect within me was drowned and put to death that day I was baptized. You can say whatever you want, but it’s falling on deaf ears. What God says about me is all that matters to me and I’ll listen to God before I ever listen to you or myself. I am a new creation and I have Christ, and that’s who God sees.”

Brothers and sisters in Christ, may this day when we remember Jesus’ baptism be a day where you remember and cherish the fact that you have been baptized too. But also may every day be a day where you remind yourself that in that act, in that Sacrament, God chose to be your God. And may every time that you see and touch and hear water be a constant reminder of what God has done and what God has promised to you through the Promise and water of baptism. Amen.