

Sermon for January 11, 2015
Mark 1:4-11

How many of us here think about our baptisms on a regular basis? I don't want to presume anything, but I think I'm pretty safe in saying that we just don't think that much about our baptisms because we just don't think it has any relevance in our daily lives. Part of that may be that it was something that happened years ago when we were infants; something that was a one time event and now it's over.

Today we celebrate Jesus' baptism and I want us to think about how important that event was in not only Jesus' life, but how baptism is the most important event in our lives. While the birth of Jesus as God becoming human is an important event; only two books of the Bible, Matthew and Luke that record this happening. But there are at least six books of the Bible, Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Acts and Romans that talk about Jesus' baptism. That should give us a clue to how important baptism is.

Let's look at why. In today's society we're surrounded by affirmation. When we post something on Facebook we can be liked by our "friends." Being on Twitter, Tumblr, and Instagram gives us the opportunity to have lots of followers most of whom we've never met. Look at our sports programs, many of them give out rewards for just showing up with medals of participation. And the newest things to pop up are the ads customized just for us based on our likes on Facebook or other items we've purchased on line.

It's no wonder that social media is so powerful when it can give us so much affirmation and I'm no different—I love to check to see how many and who's

checked one of my posts. But it's superficial—most of the people we “like” on our social media don't know us very well and we don't know them well either. So how can their “likes” give us an enduring sense of worth? We figure that it's better than nothing and we were created as social beings. In Genesis God observes that it's not good for us to be alone. So while we're on social media it gives us the perception that we are linked to many others and have formed a community of like thinking people. But is it real? Sherry Turkle, a MIT professor has discovered that people today report feeling simultaneously more connected and lonelier than ever before!

How can that be? Because while we may want affirmation what we need is acceptance; not the kind of acceptance where we change ourselves to be accepted by those we associate with, but by being accepted and valued just as we are. There is nothing more important to leading a productive, healthy life than feeling that we are accepted.

And here's where Baptism comes in. When you read Mark's account of Jesus' baptism we notice two things. First, look at God's words to Jesus. “You are my beloved Son, with you I am well pleased.” God speaks personally and powerfully with words of identity, worth, blessing and acceptance. Secondly, these words come right before Jesus' temptation and the start of his ministry. For Mark this event in Jesus' life is what everything else is based upon and that's why he puts it as the very first story of Jesus' life.

As we read later about Jesus casting out demons, healing the sick, feeding the hungry, and welcoming the other; he is only doing to others what has already

been done to him. He is telling them through word and deed that they are also God's beloved sons and daughters with whom God is well pleased. The darkest moment in Mark's story where Jesus feels abandoned is followed by the story of the resurrection where the angel testifies that God has kept the baptismal promises and has raised Jesus from the dead.

What a promise for us when we are at our lowest moments! A promise from the God who tore open the heavens to be nearer to Jesus and to us; who promises to never leave us and accepts us as beloved sons and daughters especially when we have a hard time accepting ourselves.

I find it telling that whenever Martin Luther felt the temptation to doubt God's promises he would remind himself that he was baptized. He didn't say "I am a Christian" or "I believe" but, "I am baptized." His strength and ours comes from the assurance that we are claimed by God and filled with the Holy Spirit even when it seems as though everything and everyone is telling us that we're a nobody. Through our baptism we are accepted by the creator of the universe and empowered to accept others. Baptism reminds us that wherever we may go, whatever we may do or may have done to us; God still loves us, accepts us and holds onto us.

Through our baptism we have been marked with the cross of Christ and sealed with the Holy Spirit forever; promising that there is nothing in this life that will separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus and making us beloved sons and daughters with whom God is well pleased.

