

B-07
Baptism of the Lord
January 11, 2009

MY BELOVED SON
“YOU ARE MY BELOVED...”

Genesis 1: 1-5

Acts 19: 1-7

Mark 1: 4-11

To whom do we belong? In one way it has been very easy for me to “answer” that question. I grew up in a family that had a clear sense of its heritage and roots. The first namesake of the Hales arrived in Glastonbury, Connecticut in 1633. I have had a sense of what my forbearers had accomplished from that time until now. It is a relatively long heritage for a Caucasian American. So, I have some sense from where I come. I have some sense to where I belong, at least from a human point of view.

Yet, this is not true of all of us. Many of you can, more or less, relate to what I said about my family. Some of you cannot. Perhaps you came from a broken family, or perhaps you never got to know your grandparents on your father’s side of the family. Maybe you never knew your father. I don’t know. But for those with this kind of family history, it can be very difficult to establish where one belongs, at least from a human point of view.

Our culture has all kinds of suggestions about how to belong: wear the right clothes, drive the right automobile, join the right organization or club, join the right gang, use the right deodorant, and join the right support group. The list is almost infinite. One thing we must note, all these places to which we can belong do not satisfy the deep hunger for belonging that rests deep in our souls. Admittedly, some of the options for belonging are healthier for you than others, but even they will not give you that total sense of belonging.

St. Augustine was a womanizer, until he became a Christian. He tended to live a hedonistic, immoral life. He wrote in his Confessions, after he became Christian, how his soul was restless until it rested in the Lord.

We, as the readers of Mark, are given the answer from the beginning. To whom does Jesus belong? The answer is: (God), “this is my beloved Son with whom I am well pleased.

In our passage from Mark we are given the privilege of witnessing where Jesus belongs. There is a progression in the Gospel of Mark, a progression that also exists in Matthew and Luke. But the progression is most clear in Mark. It goes something like this. The reader is let in on the “secret” from the very beginning. In our passage today we, the readers of Mark, witness Jesus being identified by God as the Son of God. There is no evidence in Mark that even John the Baptizer witnessed the rending open of the heavens and the Holy Spirit descending like a dove. Later we will notice that the spirits and demons can identify Jesus, but no one else really understands. Around the middle of the Gospel Peter

and the Disciples confessed Jesus as the Messiah, but they had no understanding about what that really entailed for Jesus. Later we, as the readers, are witnesses to a second experience of the voice from heaven when Jesus was transformed on the Mountain. It is only at the end of Mark, when Jesus was crucified, does one of the characters in the Gospel seem to understand what it meant for Jesus to be the Messiah. It was the Centurion who witnessed the death of Jesus. He is the one who said, "Surely, this was the son of God."

Jesus did not need to be baptized, at least not in the sense that you, I, and all the people - who came into the wilderness - needed to be baptized. We needed to be baptized for the repentance and forgiveness of sin. Jesus did not. So, why did Jesus get baptized? I can only speculate. I believe that Jesus chose to be baptized by John to show his complete identification with sinful humanity. Even in the first few verses of the Gospel of Mark we have an allusion to the crucifixion of Jesus, in that baptism symbolizes burial and the rising from the water symbolizes the resurrection.

And that is what our baptism is all about. Whether you were baptized as an infant or whether you were baptized later, our baptism means this, if it means anything: **WE BELONG TO THE LORD!** If you wonder whose you are, as a Christian you belong to the Lord, through the death and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth, the Christ. He has called you to belong to Him.

So what? You might ask. What difference does it make claiming that we belong to God?

1. It means that I will have a sense of greater respect for myself because I indeed DO belong to God.
2. It means that I will have a greater respect for others. Why? If I acknowledge that I belong to God, then I also know that all people either do, or need to belong to God.
3. It means that I no longer have to panic when I feel like I don't belong. You know as well as I do that the reality of belonging to God, doesn't mean that I am going to feel like I belong to God. There are times when I feel very distant from God, very lonely. I know now, though, that these lonely and distant feelings are not truth. Just because I don't feel like I belong to God, doesn't mean that I don't belong to God. The reality of belonging to God is not defined by my fluctuating emotions.
4. When we acknowledge that we all are beloved by God and belong to God, then it implies about how we are to behave with one another as a congregation.
 - a. Do we welcome others as fellow Baptizees who acknowledge we belong to Jesus Christ?
 - b. Do we treat one another as brothers and sisters in Christ, or do we need to improve in that area?

These are questions about which we all can prayerfully profit. We need to be able to look and ferret out our behaviors that are not consistent with the love of Jesus Christ. And we need to be able to do this within the loving and accepting atmosphere of our congregation.

You know, it's kind of amazing to me. Jesus of Nazareth was baptized to demonstrate God's willingness to be with sinful humankind. We are baptized to demonstrate our willingness to belong to God. In Jesus' baptism God demonstrates His identification with sinful humanity. In our baptism we demonstrate our identity with Jesus Christ! In our baptism we boldly state that we belong to God. What wonderful love this demonstrates for all of us, regardless of our backgrounds! Amen.

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