

## Child of Adam, Child of God

Luke 3:15-22

I'm not sure I should admit this, but one of the things ministers sometimes do when they get together is swap stories about the things that have gone badly wrong in their work. Calling the bride by the groom's ex-girlfriend's name, going to baptize a baby and discovering that there's no water in the font, that sort of thing. And yes, for some reason most of the unfortunate mishaps happen during weddings, baptisms, funerals and other important and public events. One of my friends tells about officiating at a funeral once with another minister, someone he hadn't seen in a long time. Too long, apparently, and unfortunately they got so caught up in catching up during the drive to the cemetery, that they never noticed it when the rest of the funeral procession made that right-hand turn.

It's easy, sometimes, to get so distracted that you miss something very important.

And so it is with the story of the baptism of Jesus. It is an easy story to get distracted in, and go off pondering the things that look interesting, but aren't really important – and there are a bunch of them in this story. It's tempting to get caught up in a rousing debate about who does baptism right – the people who advocate baptizing infants or those who insist on baptizing only believers. And what about all this business John's talking about – baptism by water vs. baptism by the Holy Spirit – are they two separate things, and if so, where does that leave us Presbyterians? We could even spend a good chunk of the morning trying to figure out why on earth Jesus needed to be baptized in the first place when he was sinless; there was nothing to wash clean.

But all those are just distractions, shiny bobbles that catch our attention and seem to demand that we nail down true and false, right and wrong out of them. And as interesting as those discussions might be, they wouldn't be fruitful discussions. They're rabbit holes Luke never intended for us to go down.

In fact, Luke doesn't have much to say about the baptism itself. John is out of the picture completely, and the Jordan River is nowhere mentioned. This is all he gives us: "Now when all the people had been baptized, and when Jesus had been baptized also..." The event that Luke is most interested in isn't the baptism itself, it's what happens **after**. What Luke wants us to spend our time talking about and thinking about is what happens to Jesus through his baptism, or because of his baptism.

Two weeks ago we talked about how Mary pondered everything in her heart – what the angels told her about her son, what Jesus had said to her about being in the temple about his Father's business, probably what Simeon and Anna said to her as well about him, how he would be the fall of many as well as their salvation. She had to ponder it, because who he was and what he was to do still wasn't really clear. And maybe, probably, it wasn't completely clear to Jesus, either. It's hard to imagine that he had a full and complete understanding of who he was and what his work was when he was a six year old, or even a thirteen year old. Maybe not even until this moment. In Matthew's gospel the voice from heaven was for everyone to hear, it was a public announcement, but in Luke, it was for Jesus' ears alone: you are my Son. This is who you are, the Beloved. The one who pleases God. What happens in his baptism is that Jesus hears from heaven itself who he is, how cherished he is. If he was ever unsure about his identity up to that moment, he is crystal clear now.

But here is the other thing Luke wants us to know: Jesus' baptism isn't just about him, it's about us, too. Remember that one vague snippet of a verse Luke gives us? "When all of the people had been baptized?" Jesus is right there in the water "with all of the people." It's a sign of

solidarity. He doesn't stand distinct, apart, separate. He's one of them. He's one of us. And so what happens to Jesus in his baptism happens to us, too. We are claimed by God. We are named by God: this is my child, my beloved. You belong to me, and with you I am well pleased. Not because of anything you have done, or should do, but just because of who you are. Aren't those the very words we have longed to hear? Words we haven't dared believe about ourselves? I recently finished a book with a wonderful title: **The Furious Love of God**. Fury, not as in anger, but as in passion and devotion. God loves us with a wild abandonment that we can scarcely take in. What Luke wants for us to take away from this story isn't just a smart theology, or even just a clear vision of who Jesus is, but a crystal clear understanding of our own identity, too. Who are you? You are a Child of God.

Now, if one of the dangers of this story is that we get distracted by the things that don't really matter here, another danger is that we get a little too focused. This has been the week for snuggling in and getting all warm and cozy, and the temptation of this story is to wrap up in this blanket of God's love and burrow in, savoring the whole idea of being beloved, and letting it keep us safe and warm in a world that is sometimes cold and inhospitable. But Luke won't let us do that.

There are two things he wants us to take away from this scene of Jesus' baptism. The first is who we are, our identity. But if you notice, Jesus didn't just take his beloved self back to the house and shop, all wrapped up in the safety of God's love for him. In another six weeks or so we'll read about how the Holy Spirit drove Jesus out into the wilderness after he was baptized. I'll admit, usually I'm partial to Luke's version of things, but in this instance I wish he'd written about a Spirit that drives, the way Mark did. He never actually wrote that the Spirit drove Jesus to work, but isn't that what happened? The very next verse tells us that Jesus was about thirty when he started his work, his ministry, the implication being that it happened right after he was baptized. The Spirit descended on him, not just to give him a feeling of warmth and security, but to empower him for his work. To be with him in his work. His baptism wasn't just a naming ceremony, it was a commissioning service.

Let's go back one more time to Luke's description of Jesus' baptism, how he waded into the water with all the people, indicating his solidarity with them? Well, he takes that one step further. If you spend much time around children you know that sometimes the best parts of a story are the ones they leave out. The lectionary doesn't include verses 23-38, his genealogy, but maybe it should have. If you go through all of those names, Jesus' grandparents and great-grandparents and great, great, great, great-grandparents, and look up their stories in the Old Testament, you'll see that they are nothing if not a mixed lot. Some saints, some sinners. Liars, cheats, swindlers, their stories and DNA getting passed on, unfiltered. As Luke says at the very end, Jesus is the Son of Adam, Son of God.

Here's the point – it was into a broken, beat-up, train-wreck of a world that Jesus came to live and went to work. He wasn't born into a family of well-bred, well-behaved folk. He didn't hang out with his fellow baptizees, reveling in being special to God, beloved by God. He went out, not just to save souls, but to change lives, to end suffering, to turn the social order upside down. He was the child of Adam, and the child of God. And so are we. Claimed and loved by God, sent back out into the world.

I'm not much of one for New Year's resolutions, but I'm all for stopping and reassessing your life from time to time. Taking stock of your goals and priorities, seeing if you are living the life you really want to be living. The financial crisis of the past year has caused a lot of us to take a

step back and do just that. We've had to stop and ask ourselves what is really important to us. Are we finding meaning and joy in the way we're spending our time and energy and resources?

I think this text gives us the perfect opportunity to do that same task as the church. Take stock. Re-focus. Re-evaluate what we are doing and why we are doing it. Simplify our lives, maybe. And if we've maybe lost sight of what is important, what our time and energy and resources should be spent on, Luke reminds us: we should be living out our baptism.

How? First, by claiming our identity. Sounds simple and obvious enough, but sometimes we get a bit lost. We aren't church-goers, or Presbyterians, or members of Covenant; we are children of God. We share that same intimate relationship with God that Jesus had. That's what our energy and commitment should be on here in the church. Fostering that relationship. Nurturing it. Praying. Drawing closer to the God who loves us with a fury. Not just learning about God, but leaning how to be closer to God. Learning how to love God the way Jesus did, the way God loves us.

But we aren't just children of God, we are children of Adam, too. God's watery mark on us doesn't pull us out of the world any more than it pulled Jesus out and kept him safe and secure in the company of like-minded disciples. Our doors should be revolving doors. We come in to worship, to be nurtured and encouraged in our faith, and then go right back out again to heal broken souls and bodies, and turn a broken world upside down. We are claimed, and we are commissioned. Loved and sent. It's pretty simple, actually. You are loved by God. Now, love God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength, and love your neighbor.

Is that what we are doing here, or have we gotten distracted with the non-essentials? There's an easy way to tell. If we are, this place will be full of energy and life and love and grace. The Spirit that claims us and drives us will be evident to all. And if not, then the good news is, that's an easy thing to change. Remember your baptism.