

THE SERMON

Baptism of the Lord

Sunday, January 12, 2025

And He Shall Be Called ...

BELOVED

Mark 1:9-11

Beloved Church, *and He shall be called...* ***"The Beloved"***

Believe it or not, today we are concluding our sermon series called ***"And He Shall Be Called."*** This series took us through three different seasons: the season of Advent, Christmas, and Epiphany. And during these Sundays, we have reflected on the names given to the Messiah by the prophet in **Isaiah 9:6** when he says:

"For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace."

Each of these names, or titles, gave us a characteristic of who Jesus is. So, let me briefly give you a glimpse of what we say of each of them; we say that Jesus is...

Wonderful: because we acknowledge the miraculous nature of his being and his work among us,

Counsellor: because Jesus guides us through the complexities of life, with counsel and care.

Mighty God: because his power goes beyond human power, and enables us to be strong in His words.

Everlasting Father: Because his divine and eternal presence is among us.

Prince of Peace: Because He offers us peace, not like the world, but a peace that goes beyond our own understanding.

Then, we spent some time in the gospel, reflecting on some of the names given to the Messiah as his proper name – **Jesus**. The name given by the magi, as they called him, ***“King of the Jews,”*** and today, we reflect on the name given at his baptism when God the Father says: ***“You are my Son, the Beloved, with you I am well pleased”*** (v.11)

In this brief yet powerful account, we witness Jesus' humble act of baptism and the divine affirmation of His identity as the Beloved Son of God. These words of love

resound through the ages, echoing in the hearts of believers around the world.

As we explore this passage, we will discover the significance of being called "**Beloved**" and reflect on the depth of the loving relationship between God the Father and His Son. We will also see how our love for the Son should constantly rise to ascend towards the infinite love God the Father has for his Eternal Son.

You have probably heard me say, "Beloved Church," at the beginning of this sermon series. What am I trying to say when I say that?

The term "**Beloved**" is not merely an affectionate title; it signifies an intimate and treasured relationship. It conveys the idea of deep love, connection, and recognition. When God proclaims Jesus as His Beloved Son at His baptism, God affirms Jesus' identity and highlights His profound relationship with the Father.

In the United Methodist tradition, we are reminded of the significance of our own identity as children of God. Just as Jesus was recognized as the Beloved, we, through baptism, are welcomed into the family of God. In Galatians 3:26-27, we read, "**For in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith. As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.**" Our baptism marks our transition into this

loving relationship, where we are adopted as beloved children destined to reflect the love of Christ in our lives.

The baptism of our Lord and the recognition of Him as "Beloved" reminds us of our own baptism as a sacrament in our Christian journey.

So, reflecting on our baptism some time ago, I read the following joke that I would like to share with you.

A drunk man stumbled along a baptismal service on Sunday afternoon down by the river. He proceeded to walk down into the water and stood next to the Preacher. The minister turned and noticed the old drunk man and said, "Mister, Are you ready to find Jesus?" The drunk looks back and says, "Yes, Preacher. I sure am." The minister then dunked the fellow under the water and pulled him right back up. "Have you found Jesus?" the preacher asks. "No, I didn't!" says the drunk man. The preacher then dunks him under for quite a bit longer, brings him up, and says, "Now, brother, have you found Jesus?" "No, I did not Preacher." The preacher, in disgust, holds the man under for at least 30 seconds. This time brings him out of the water and says in a harsh tone, "Friend, are you sure you haven't found Jesus yet?" The old drunk wipes his eyes and says to the preacher..."Are you sure this is where he fell in because I still can't find him?"

What a way to find the Beloved One!

To find Jesus is to have a relationship of closeness with Him, just as the relationship between God the Father and Jesus which is characterized by mutual love and affection. As we reflect on the baptism scene, we cannot overlook the role of the Holy Spirit—descending like a dove, a symbol of peace and divine presence. This moment highlights the unity of the Trinity—***the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit***—each part of a loving relationship that invites us into its depths.

In John 3:35, we read, "***The Father loves the Son and has placed everything in his hands.***" This declaration reveals that the love between the Father and the Son is not merely a passive sentiment; it is an active, dynamic force that propels the Son into His mission, culminating in the ultimate act of love on the cross. Jesus' entire ministry, filled with healing, teaching, and sacrifice, flows from His deep love with His Father.

Now, let us turn our attention to our response to this divine love. ***How do we, as followers of Christ, express our love for the Beloved Son of God?***

In John 15:9-10, Jesus invites us into this relationship of love: "***As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I***

have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love." Our love for Christ should be an ascending love—constantly rising towards the infinite love of God the Father for His Son.

This love is not static; it requires action, commitment, and a willingness to grow. It compels us to seek a deeper relationship with Christ through prayer, study of the Word, and acts of service. The United Methodist tradition emphasizes the importance of grace—a grace that enables us to love God and others more fully. As we experience God's grace in our lives, our love for Christ deepens, and our capacity to reflect that love to the world expands.

So, how do we live as Beloved Children?

To be called "beloved" is no small thing. It echoes throughout Scripture, inviting us into the divine narrative of God's love for His creation. When God speaks these words to Jesus, it is not merely an acknowledgment of His identity as the Son but an invitation into an eternal relationship that transcends time and space.

The proclamation of Jesus as "beloved" also invites us into a response. Knowing we are loved invites us to love in return. We are not just recipients of God's love; we are called to be ambassadors of that love in the world.

In Galatians 3:26-28, Paul reminds us that we are all children of God through faith in Christ Jesus. This means that every baptism we witness is a tangible reminder of our identity as beloved, a community called to reflect the infinite love that God showers upon us.

So, how do we embody this identity as beloved?

- **Cultivate Intimacy with the Father:** Spend time in prayer, reading Scripture, and meditating on God's word. Allow the Holy Spirit to deepen your understanding of God's love for you.
- **Spread Love in Action:** Love beyond words. Engage in acts of kindness, serve those in need, and embody Christ's love in your daily interactions. Allow your love for the Son to be revealed in how you love others.
- **Live in Community:** We are not meant to walk this journey alone. Join together in fellowship, encourage one another, and share your experiences of God's love. Celebrate baptisms not just as individual milestones but as communal affirmations of our shared identity as God's beloved.

Beloved Church, as we reflect on our Lord's baptism, let us remember that we are also invited into this sacred identity. We are beloved. The Father's voice rings out not just over Jesus but over each one of us.

In this season, at the beginning of a new year, may our love for the Son rise and ascend towards the infinite love that the Father has for His Eternal Son. Let us proclaim, through our lives, that we are indeed the beloved children of God, called to reflect His love to a world in desperate need of hope.

May we leave this place today transformed and inspired to live as the beloved, knowing that just as the heavens opened for Jesus, the heavens opened for us, too, inviting us into the embrace of divine love. **Amen.**