

010812BAPTISM
MARK 1: 11 ...LOOKING FOR BLESSING

The Christmas story is filled with characters; from angels to shepherds, wise men to Simeon, all declaring Jesus to be the promised Messiah of God. One question that remains, however, is when did Jesus figure out who he was? Outside of one incident recorded only in Luke's gospel featuring Jesus as a precocious 12 year old, we know very little of his early life.

It is in his baptism, when he was about 30 years old, that everything changes. As he stands knee deep in the muddy waters of the Jordan, Jesus hears a voice declaring him to be the beloved son with whom God is pleased. With that affirmation, Jesus begins three years of public ministry that includes teaching and healing that leads straight to the cross, but he never doubts who he is.

Who are the most confident people that you know in your life; the people who seem to have a sure certainty of who they are and what they are to do? These are people who rarely get rattled by the surprises life may bring. They take each day in stride, adapting and adjusting without hesitating. They seem to have an inner affirmation; not boastful, but simple confidence in who they are.

Most of us are not like them. We are a little more hesitant in our self-confidence. We spend a great deal of time looking for some affirmation, but in our world that is hard to find. We look for affirmation from our parents, but often we do not hear it. I went to a national men's movement gathering in Washington years ago. Listening to men tell stories of never feeling their parents' blessing was painfully powerful. There are many women who feel they never had their parents' blessing either.

We look for affirmation from our spouses and partners, but often we do not feel it is there. An old “Lena and Öle” joke has Lena saying, “Öle, you never tell me you love me anymore.” To which Öle responds, “I told you I loved you on our wedding day. If I change my mind, I will tell you.” (Men-don’t try this at home!)

We look for affirmation from our bosses or managers but often feel as if it is missing. This is especially so in our present economy where workers have to do more with less, while the security of salaries and pensions is now uncertain.

We look for affirmation from our children and /or grandchildren but often feel criticized more than complimented. We are surprised by their comments or actions and ask, “Who are you and what have you done with my child?”

The truth is that we do not live in a very affirming world, and when we do hear affirmation from its voices it is only because of what we do -but such affirmation is temporary. For years Mike Wallace was the voice of “60 Minutes”. He is now 93 and his son says, “This is a man for whom work came first. Now he cannot even remember what he did and the world has passed him by.”

Most of all we look for some sign of affirmation from God. It would be nice to have a divine voice whisper in our ear, “You are my beloved and I am pleased with you.” If God said that to us then our lives would be far more confident and courageous. We could get through the bumpy times in life much easier. We would be as clear as Jesus was who we are and what we are here for. When it comes to hearing the voice of God, however, most of us hear only a cosmic silence. We pray, we worship, we read the Bible and devotions but in our heart of hearts we are not sure how God thinks of us - if God thinks about us at all.

When you don't feel affirmed by those around you or the God above you, there is a hole in the heart that nothing seems to fill. We go through the motions of life but never feel like we are embracing life. If you feel less than affirmed this morning then the gospel has good news! In your baptism, God claimed you as beloved child, not because of what you do but because of what Jesus did.

The blessing of God's voice at Jesus' baptism became the very thing that led to his death. At his trial he was asked if he thought he was the son of God, and when he answered yes, he was charged with blasphemy. Jesus knew what his baptism would lead to but never wavered. Because of his willingness to love us freely and without condition, you and I have the very affirmation of God.

Our baptism into Christ points the way to the very heart of God and no one can take that away from us. Being marked in baptism is being tattooed by God's grace. The affirmation of the world is temporary and fickle. The affirmation given in baptism us is unconditional because it comes through Christ's cross.

In December I had to renew my driver's license. It is a photo id that I am asked to show to clerks whenever I use a debit card because it guarantees who I am. I don't carry my baptismal certificate with me and no one has ever asked to see it. It is not something I carry in my wallet but it is something I carry in my heart. I know who I am because I know whose I am. My prayer and hope is that the affirmation of God for you is in your heart as well!

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