

Deacon Rick Miech Homily 1/10/21

Here we are, once again, gathered together to celebrate the one thing, the most important thing that really matters: that God is deeply in love with us, and today we hear and break open God's word.

There's a question that needs to be answered in the context of the readings selected for this weekend of the Baptism of the Lord, a question of identity.

Who are you? I don't know if you've thought about this or realized just how often and in what ways you're asked this question. Our identities are found in so many places, and we can't do much, these days, without proving to someone who we are. Drivers license, social security number, Passport, address, Medicare number, userid and password for email, loyalty card number at the grocery store, pin number, login information for websites – we are asked to prove, over and over again, that we are who we say we are, no one takes for granted that if we say it's me, it really is.

Some places require, either on the phone or online, that we answer a number of security questions: mother's maiden name; mother's city of birth; name of our favorite pet; model of our first car. Some places, websites with access to critical information, require two-factor authentication. We tell them what they want to know up-front, and then they send us a code to our phone or email account with a number that we have to enter, just to make sure we're not someone else with mischievous intentions. Identity theft is a big thing these days. And while I know what evil people will do with a stolen identity, it baffles me that anyone would want my identity. I mean, c'mon, it's just me!

Who are **you**?

In the six verses that come before today's gospel from Mark, the verses we heard on the 2nd Sunday of Advent, Mark goes out of his way to provide some identity for both Jesus and John the Baptist. One can't read the first line of Mark's gospel and not know something very important. He writes:

"The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ the Son of God."

Before we go too much further, it's important to once again remember that, according to our Scripture scholars, all four of the Gospel writers are basically anonymous. None of them actually met or journeyed with Jesus. We know this because of when they were written down. These were not blow-by-blow accounts with reporters at the scene of all the events. They were, and are, testimonies of faith by the writers to the truth about Jesus.

Mark's was the earliest gospel written, and it was enough for him to make that bold statement identifying Jesus. Matthew and Luke both had access to Mark's gospel and used most, if not all of it, when they crafted their versions of the Good News. But for them, and for their respective audiences, the bold statement was not enough when it came to identifying who Jesus was and where he came from. And so, each of them constructed a prelude to their respective gospels – a story of origin, written with a

Hebrew Testament flair. These are the stories we've heard during the Advent and Christmas seasons. Why? Because important, noteworthy people in the Hebrew Testament had remarkable origin stories.

(Isaac, Samson, Moses). John the Baptist was so important to the writer of Luke's gospel that he **also** had an extraordinary birth story. And Matthew traces Jesus' lineage all the way back to Adam in excruciating detail.

Now the rest of Mark's gospel is about Jesus, but he immediately provides identity information about this messenger, John the Baptist. And just to make sure he wasn't mistaken as the One, the Messiah, John proclaims, "One mightier than I is coming after me."

Who **are** you?

Why is this question so important? Well, in the ancient Mediterranean world, it was essential to know one's identity because it served as a placeholder for someone in the society of that time. We know from Matthew and Luke that Joseph had adopted and claimed Jesus as his son. A child was not considered as a daughter or son until the father of that child claimed them as his own. As the son of a craftsman from a village in the boondocks, Jesus had no legitimacy as a public figure. He was essentially, of his human foster-father, a nobody.

With Mark's passage today, nobody can doubt or call into question Jesus' public identity, because he is claimed by God himself as his beloved Son.

Another reason this is important in the ancient Mediterranean world is that an individual from this time would have no real identity or meaningful existence apart from his kin, and Jesus has left his family and his village. Because he was no longer connected to his family in the traditional way, he would have been considered as good as dead. It's at this point that God himself personally acknowledges and declares Jesus pleasing as his beloved Son.

I don't know the last time you were present for a baptism, but after the initial questions for the parents and godparents, the baptizing minister says these words: "**the Church of God receives you with great joy. In her name I sign you with the Sign of the Cross of Christ our Savior;**" The soon to be baptized is received and signed and given an identity with Christ.

The baptizing minister prays over the waters of baptism, and recalling the presence of the Spirit descending upon Jesus at his baptism, he calls down the power of the Holy Spirit into the font. And in the final prayer he prays: "**...this child, reborn through Baptism, is now called a child of God, for so indeed he/she is.**" And later, "**...in the spirit of adoption as sons and daughters which we have all received, let us pray together...**"

You and I, each one of us, through our Baptism, have been claimed by our God in the name of Jesus Christ, as beloved daughters and sons. In today's Gospel Jesus is

confirmed in who he is through John's baptism. We are confirmed, identified in who we are at our baptism as God's beloved child, our defining moment. Christmas, the focus on the child Jesus, ends today. The focus changes to the adult Jesus and the beginning of his ministry on earth.

We're reminded today that our Baptism isn't just ceremonial, one of the punches on our Catholic ticket. As baptized sons and daughters, there's work to be done. We're not meant to sit at home and ignore what goes on "out there." As long as we can move, there's something for each of us to do.

Who are you?

Filled with grace at our baptism, we are intended to be conduits of grace for others. We are committed to a lifestyle modeled on the Gospel. We have a relationship with our God and it requires a lot of hard work on our part.

Do you truly believe that God takes delight in his creation? Do you believe that God takes delight in you? What light is it that you are called to birth into a world filled with darkness? What is God calling you to do that only YOU can do? Answer these questions and you'll know the answer to the question: Who are you? And why? Because somehow or other, those who do not yet know Jesus must first see him in you.