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***Baptized***  
***Mark 1:4-11***

*So John the Baptizer appeared<sup>[e]</sup> in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.<sup>5</sup> And the whole Judean region and all the people of Jerusalem were going out to him and **were baptized** by him in the River Jordan, confessing their sins.<sup>6</sup> Now John was clothed with camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey.<sup>7</sup> He proclaimed, "The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the strap of his sandals.<sup>8</sup> **I have baptized you with<sup>[f]</sup> water, but he will baptize you with<sup>[g]</sup> the Holy Spirit."***

*<sup>9</sup> In those days **Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan.**<sup>10</sup> And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens **torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove upon him.**<sup>11</sup> And a voice came from the heavens, "**You are my Son, the Beloved, with you I am well pleased.**"*

One of my **favorite** things to do in church is a baptism.  
I love to say the whole given name of someone,  
because I know it's a name chosen just for them.  
And when I baptize them, I know that they are being identified and confirmed  
as a **Beloved child of God.**

Names are **powerful.**

Do you know what your name means?

Do you know what your parents' inspiration was for your name?

I was named Natalie by my Dad, after the actress Natalie Wood.

Do you know the story of your name?

Of course, the power of parents to name their children sometimes go **awry.**  
We've all met those children with well, shall we say, interesting names!  
But parents don't always have the final word on our names and what they mean.....

In their fascinating book, *Freakonomics*, economists Steven Levitt and Stephen Dubner point out that one of the first acts of parental power comes in the naming of

a child. Many believe the name carries great significance. But that's not always true. Take the case of the *Lane brothers*.

Back in 1958, a baby boy was born into the Lane family. Robert—the father—chose to name the boy *Winner*.

The Lanes had another son several years later. And for unknown reasons, he named this baby Loser! Contrary to all expectations, *Loser Lane* succeeded. He graduated from college and later became a sergeant with the New York Police Department. His colleagues simply referred to him as Lou.

And what of the other brother? The most noteworthy achievement of *Winner Lane*, is the length of his criminal record! *Steven Levitt and Stephen Dubner, Freakonomics (HarperCollins, 2005), pp.163-164*

Thankfully, *parents don't* have the final word on our names!

We know that *Jesus had a special name*,

Emmanuel, which means God With Us.

And, he was named Beloved Son, at his baptism.

When the voice of God descended as the Spirit upon Jesus,

the voice said, 'this is *my Son, the Beloved*, with you I am well pleased'.

Names are so powerful because they are used to *identify* us every day of our lives.

We each have *different* names too—what are your names? and nicknames?

My family used to call me Bones because I used to be skinny. Oh the days.

To most of my family now, I'm "Aunt Nat".

Who are you?

Of course some names are *given* to us, and some are *taken*.

Sometimes Dennis ends up being called Denny, much to his dismay.

Some names are given to us bring us great *pride*, like *smartie*

Some names bring us *shame*, like *dummie*, or *jerk*,

Some names bring us *joy*, and other names bring us *sorrow*.

What are the names that have brought you *joy*?

I want you to *re-imagine your baptism* for a moment,

And if you haven't been baptized, imagine it with me.

Remembering the names you've been given,

even those names that brought you pain,

and imagine yourself receiving the water of baptism,

And Hearing God's voice speak directly to you:

“you are my *Beloved Child*, with you I am well pleased.”

*Beloved Child of God*—that’s your real name.

It’s the name that really matters in life.

But have you ever thought of it that way?

Ever wondered what the world would be like if we treated one another

As beloved children of God?

Beloved Child of God—is *your name, and His name*.

It’s why this story of Jesus’ baptism is so important.

You know, Jesus’ *baptism* happens

BEFORE his temptation and his ministry in ALL the gospels.

In the Gospel of Mark—it is the *FIRST thing we learn about Jesus---*

not the nativity, not the announcement to Mary,

No, we hear about John the Baptist, and then Jesus being baptized.

That’s how the story of Jesus begins.

Baptism comes before his temptation in the desert, and his ministry.

In other words, Jesus’ *identity comes before* his mission.

He needed to know *WHO he was* before he knew *WHAT to do*.

Isn’t that thing true for us?

Do we need to know *WHOSE we are* before we know *what to do* with our lives?

What if we live into our mission in this world,

when we realize our true *identity* as a Beloved Child of God?

That happens at *baptism*, or as we *remember* our baptism.

At baptism, we are blessed by God’s Spirit, brought into the family of faith,

and confirmed as a beloved child of God forever.

Today as we remember Jesus’ baptism, and our own,

What if we asked ourselves this question:

*Do I know my name? My true identity?*

Do I *believe* that I am a Beloved Child of God?

I think we discover who we are, by *hearing and believing WHOSE* we are.

So many people want to *define us* in this world,

At work, school, home, and online—

We have hundreds of people trying to tell us who we are.

But what if we know and believe that our primary name is *Christian*?

And our primary identity is *Beloved Child of God*.

Take a moment and say that—*I am a Christian*.

Now say this: I am a *Beloved Child of God*.

Sometimes we don't necessarily believe those *two things go* together.

We believe we are Christians, we believe in Jesus,

but we may or may not believe that we are beloved children of God.

So many people believe in a God of wrath or anger or so much judgment that we cannot possibly be *beloved* children.

But we are—

We are Christians and we are named.... *beloved child of God*.

This is *why Jesus was baptized*.

he didn't need to have his sins washed away.

He did it *for us*, because he is one of us, and showing us what baptism truly is.

It's that moment when Father, Son, and Spirit come together to confirm *whose we are, and who we are*—Beloved children of God.

It's the *identity* we need to truly follow our mission in life.

If we believe that we are Beloved children of God,

If we really believe that,

Doesn't that help us *face the challenges* of this world?

What if that one belief could *change our lives*?

And change the world around us?

What if.....

You are more than a *victim* wherever you've been hurt—  
you are a child of God.

You are more than a *caretaker*—  
you are a beloved child of God.

You are more than an *employee*, or an unemployed worker—  
you are a beloved child of God.

You are more than a *grieving* person—  
you are a beloved child of God.

You are more than someone with *illness*—  
you are a beloved child of God.

It doesn't matter if your name is Dennis or Delores,  
 whatever your name,  
 in baptism you are *truly named* by Father, Son, and Spirit,  
 With the most beautiful, powerful, name of all:  
*Beloved Child of God.*

And receiving this name is *affirmation from God.*  
 Ever heard of the *5 love languages*?  
 The five different ways that most of us show and experience love?  
 They are **touch, quality time, acts of service, gifts, and---words of affirmation.**  
 We all have a couple that mean more to us than the others.  
*Words of affirmation* is a primary love language of millions of people.

I think we can see this on social media.  
 People with profiles online want other people to respond, or like, or post a heart,  
 agree with it, thumbs up it, and pass it on!  
*We crave affirmation.*

But there is something else we need, with affirmation.  
*It's acceptance.*  
 I think we all want *to belong*—to something bigger than ourselves.

Many times, *affirmation is what we need*—  
 and what we should offer that to one another.  
*But we also need acceptance, and belonging.*  
 And baptism brings that acceptance,  
 Because in baptism we are brought into that *community of faith*,  
 where we are loved and accepted, *just for who we are.*

When God says *this is my Beloved Child*,  
 that is a sign and seal that we are part of the community of faith,  
 the body of Christ, the family of God.  
*It is both affirmation, and acceptance.*  
 Two things every person craves, and every person needs.

In our Book of Common Worship is a service to reaffirm our baptism.  
 It's *not a re-baptism*, but a service of *celebration and remembrance.*  
 Today we are going to answer once again the baptismal questions,  
 and re-affirm our faith.

We will come to the water with prayer.  
You will then have the opportunity to come forward if you wish,  
and receive a symbol of baptism at the font.

*If you have not yet been baptized, listen* to these questions,  
Come up for a symbol,  
And make time to talk to me about being baptized.

Friends, the *Good news of the Gospel today is our BAPTISM.*  
*It is our identity---We are beloved children of God!*  
So—*remember that you are baptized!*  
And for that good news, all God's people can say together, Amen.