

“SHOW ME A SIGN: I – WATER”
Karen F. Bunnell
Elkton United Methodist Church
January 7, 2018

Baptism of the Lord

Mark 4:1-11

Well, I don't know about you, but I'm about over this freezing weather. I like the cold, but enough is enough, right?! I know from talking to a lot of you, or seeing things you post on Facebook, that most of you are doing what I've been doing – staying inside as much as we can, catching up on things, de-decorating from Christmas, and watching, sometimes binge-watching things on TV.

Well, you know me. I love watching old TV – on the Hallmark channel and ME TV and so forth. Of course, Lucy is at the top of my list, but some others are “Leave It to Beaver” and “The Andy Griffith Show.” When it comes to those two shows, there is a recurrent theme running through them, and it is that the boys try to have their parents be proud of them – and of course, most of the stories are about the things they do that test that pride.

One of my very favorite episodes of “The Andy Griffith Show” was called “Opie's Charity.” It revolved around a charity drive being carried out in the town, for which the school children were invited to take part. The woman running the charity was a boastful woman who liked to keep track of what everybody gave. So, of course, she happens to mention to Andy that she'd been to school to get the kid's donations, and when he says he's sure Opie gave it, she replied, “Yes, but he only gave three cents.”

Well, Andy is embarrassed and mad. He can't believe his son – the son of the sheriff, by the way, a public official – gave such a paltry sum, and he confronts Opie about it. Opie tells him that he couldn't give more than that, because he's saving his money to get something for his little girlfriend. Which makes Andy even madder, so he scolds him and tells him to give more to the charity.

The next time he asks about it, Opie tells him again that he couldn't give any more because he had to save money to buy something for that friend. This time Andy blows up and sends Opie upstairs without dinner. At which time, Aunt Bea steps in and confronts Andy about his lack of faith in his son.

Backing down, Andy calls Opie back downstairs and tells him that it's okay if he wants to keep his money to buy his little friend a gift – to which Opie tells him

that it wasn't a present he was saving money to give her – it was actually a coat because hers was worn out and her family didn't have money to buy her a new one.

At one and the same moment, Andy was ashamed of himself for his lack of faith in his son, and bursting with pride that his son Opie had such a tender heart, trying to help someone in need.

There's nothing like a parent's approval, is there? And how important it is to know that your parents or people you respect are proud of you. We want to know that we matter. We want to know that people affirm us and appreciate us.

When we were growing up, we wanted to be included. There was nothing worse than being in phys ed class, and having captains choose teams, and standing there, as one by one, others were chosen before us. Or not being part of the in crowd, or not getting asked to the prom.

And then, we grow older and hopefully outgrow the need to be affirmed like that, but sadly, it just takes other forms. We want to be liked and accepted by the right people, the right groups. We do extra things to be noticed at work and rewarded for it. And things as silly as social media – when we post things on Facebook, for instance – we check to see how many people liked it, or commented on it.

We human beings crave affirmation and acceptance, and the sad thing is, that we don't have to, because in baptism, we have been affirmed and accepted once and for all, by God himself. To remember that, we need only look at today's Gospel lesson, and the story of Jesus' baptism.

You heard those beautiful words when Jesus came up out of the water after John baptized him – the voice of God came from heaven, and spoke to Jesus himself, saying – “You are my Son, the beloved. With you, I am well pleased.”

What an affirmation. What incredible words to hear as soon, Jesus would begin his earthly ministry. Surely that was why, no matter what would happen over the next three years – and we know they were filled with people attacking him – no matter what, Jesus always knew that he was precious to God, and God loved him and was pleased with him. And because he knew that, he could be and do what God called him to be and do.

I was reminded this week of a chapter in Alex Haley's incredible book *Roots* of the time when the character named Omorro gives his newborn son, Kunta Kinte, his name. Haley wrote, “Omorro lifted the infant, and as all watched, whispered three times into his son's ear the name he has chosen for him. It was the first time the name had ever been spoken as the child's name, for Omorro's people felt that

each human being should be the first to know who he was.” (Gerard Fuller, *Stories for All Seasons*, p. 12)

I loved that when I read it again, because I think it reflects so beautifully what happened in Jesus’ baptism – that God whispered his name to him – and said this is who you are – my beloved Son – I love you and I am well pleased with you.

And it reflects so beautifully what happened in our baptisms as well. Through the waters poured and the words spoken, we tell each person being baptized that they are special, they are beloved, God loves them and is pleased with them too.

But even more, baptism also marks us as part of a community of believers. Remember that when Jesus was baptized, others were being baptized by John too. He was part of a larger community, and so are we, because of baptism. We are part of the church universal, bound together with others through the waters of baptism. It is something that no one and nothing can ever take away from us.

After Jesus was baptized, notice what he did. He came up out of the River Jordan and went on his way into the world. First, he went through the time of temptation in the desert, but then he went into his earthly ministry, and I think it’s safe to say, that everything he did along the way for others, was a reflection of what God did for him in baptism – and that was to affirm and accept them.

Think about it. He went especially to the last, the lost and the least – the ones society deemed as lesser than, or unworthy. He healed the long suffering, whom others have given up on. He reached out to sinners like Zaccheus, who were not only scorned by society, but thought pretty little of themselves. He stood up for and included women and children, when society deemed them as second class citizens. So when you think about it, everything Jesus did was a reflection of what God said to him in his baptism. In all those ways, Jesus said to people, you are beloved.

So today, I invite us to remember that, by virtue of our baptisms, we are called to do the same. To help people know that they are beloved – not because they have certain degrees, or certain jobs, or belong to the right clubs or groups, or live in certain neighborhoods – but they are beloved simply because God calls them that and is pleased with them. And my goodness, you’d better believe that people need to be reminded of that these days.

And I want to suggest that we can do that every single day, in the way we talk to people, the way we interact with them, the way we notice them instead of make them feel invisible, in the way we lift them up when they feel down. What would happen if, every single day, we would think to ourselves – how can I show

those whom I meet this day that they are God's beloved child? I think it might change the things we say and do for the better.

You want to know a concrete way you could show some people they are beloved this week? Well, you've probably heard by now that the Rotating Homeless Shelter is back on, and it's starting up tomorrow. There is a great need for people to help – especially with overnights. I know it's difficult to do, but oh, what a powerful way to tell hurting people that they matter, that God loves them and so do we. So if you think you could help out with this, please let me know. I'll put you in touch with the right people.

My friends, on this day that we remember Jesus' baptism, I invite you to remember your own baptism. Oh I know that many of you can't remember it literally, because you were baptized as an infant, but you can remember that in that moment, God named you, and claimed you, and marked you as beloved and precious. May all of us, named, claimed and marked as beloved, go forth from this place to share that love and affirmation with all the world, and especially with those who need to hear that good news the most.

As a reminder of who you are and whose you are, after you receive communion this morning, you'll see a bowl of water in which are some shells. I invite you to put your hand in the water and remember your baptism. Remember that God named you and claimed you and made you part of the community of faith. And then, if you want, take a shell as a constant reminder of your belovedness and your call to love others as he loves you.

My friends, today, as we remember the baptism of Jesus, remember your baptism, and be thankful! May it be so.

Amen.