

## “My Beloved Son”

Matthew 3:11-17

First Presbyterian Church, Corpus Christi, TX

Rev. Charles S. Blackshear • January 20, 2013

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Who are you? If I were to ask you that question how would you answer? Who *are* you? What is it that identifies who you are? The government issues various documents in an effort to establish your identity – passports, birth certificates, driver’s license – but I don’t think you would say you’re your driver’s license adequately captures your complete identity.

So what is it that identifies who you are? Where did you get that identity? The most obvious answer would be your family. That’s where you got your name and many of your personality traits. Who am I? I’m a Blackshear. Your family heritage could be one way to identify you, but even in families everyone is different. Perhaps you get your identity from where you live or where you grew up. I grew up in Louisiana and that has certainly influenced who I am today. But again, not everyone who grows up in Corpus Christi is the same.

Advertisers want you to believe that you get your identity from the kind of car you drive or the size house you live in, from the clothes you wear or even the beer you drink. Their message is usually the same. You can be remake your identity just by buying our car or clothes or whatever.

Many people find their identity in their career, in the kind of work they do. Sadly, we train our children to think this way from the time they are very young. We ask, “What do you want to *be* when you grow up?” We make them think that who they *are* is based on what they *do*. This is why so many people, particularly workaholics, struggle with depression when they retire. The thing that they thought defined them – their job – is gone. But changing careers or jobs or retiring doesn’t change who you are.

But society tells us that you get to define who you are. If you don’t like the person you’ve become all you have to do is move, or change jobs, or go back to school and you can be someone else.

I think it’s most tragic, however, when people believe that their identity and their sense of value is somehow based on some physical aspect about themselves, like their weight, or how they compare to the models in a magazine, or the color of their skin. Often times people who suffer from a disease like cancer will think that the cancer *is* their identity.

None of these things is able to define who you are. None of these things – not your career, your family, the place where you live, the clothes you wear or the car you drive – none of these is able to show you your true identity. That’s because your real identity is found only in Christ.

At the very beginning of the Bible, in Genesis 1:27, we find this: “So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.” God designed us in his own image. Our true identity and our value comes from the fact that we are created in the image of God. But you don’t get very far in Genesis before you discover that things have gone horribly wrong. Sin has come into the world and into each of our lives. The image of God in humanity has been marred. It’s been damaged and we can’t fix it. That’s where Jesus comes in.

We learned last week that John the Baptist was the first prophet in Israel in 400 years. He came preaching that the Messiah was coming and that the people needed to repent, to turn away from their sin and turn back toward God. As part of his message he

was baptizing people in the Jordan River as a sign of that repentance. Huge crowds were coming to be baptized. But John recognized that his baptism was only in order to point people to the coming Messiah. He said, "I baptize you with water for repentance, but he who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."

Then one day Jesus shows up at the banks of the Jordan and asks to be baptized. It's certain that John and Jesus would have known each other since their mothers were cousins. We learn from the other gospels that John recognized Jesus as the Messiah that he'd been prophesying about and so he tries to talk Jesus out of it. John's question was basically, "why would *you* need to be baptized?" We still ask that same question today. If Jesus is in fact perfect, why would he need to be baptized for repentance?

Jesus gives John part of the answer: "it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness." In Matthew's gospel, righteousness means doing the will of God. Jesus comes to be baptized because he is obedient to the Father. The other part of the answer has to do with his identity. Here at the very beginning of his ministry, Jesus comes to be baptized because he is identifying with us and with our sinful humanity. He literally and figuratively wades into the water with the rest of us. Dale Bruner calls this Jesus' first miracle, the "miracle of his humility."

So John baptizes Jesus and when Jesus comes up out of the water the heavens open. Matthew is pointing us to Isaiah 64:1 which says, "Oh that you would tear open the heavens and come down...to make your name known." And down comes the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove, coming to rest on Jesus. And then there's a voice from heaven: "This is my beloved Son, with

whom I am well pleased." The Jewish people present would have instantly recognized God's words. Psalm 2, which was considered to be about the Messiah, says, "The LORD said to me, 'You are my Son; today I have begotten you,'" and Isaiah 42:1 says, "Behold my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights; I have put my Spirit upon him."

Here at the start of Jesus' public ministry we find the Trinity, all three persons of the Godhead, involved – God the Son, Jesus, is in the water, God the Father speaks, and God the Holy Spirit in the form of the dove. At the very end of the gospel of Matthew, Jesus tells his disciples to baptize into the name of the Father and Son and Spirit.

God the Father is confirming for those present and for the whole world that Jesus is in fact the Messiah, the Son of God. He is confirming Jesus' identity and he's basically saying, "if you want to know *me*, get to know my son." Jesus is the complete self-revelation of God to humanity.

But Jesus' baptism isn't just about HIS identity, it's also about OURS. The best way to explain it is to look at his command to baptize in Matthew 28. Jesus says, "Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them *into* the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit." In our baptism we are adopted into God's family. We are united with Christ. The name of God is placed on those who receive it.

Romans 6:4-5 says, "We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his." The promise of

baptism is that we participate in Christ's resurrection. We no longer need to fear death, it has no power over us.

That also means that when God the Father says, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased," He is talking to you as well. You've been adopted into the household of God. You are His beloved with whom He is well pleased. You have value. That's your true identity. This doesn't mean you won't sin again, of course you will. But it does mean that God gives you the strength that makes it possible (although not necessarily easy) to overcome sins. "The

same Spirit who empowered Jesus now strengthens his disciples to live for him."

So what do we take away from this today? First, if you are a follower of Christ, God loves you and He is pleased with you. Second, you have available to you the power of the Holy Spirit to live a life pleasing to God, doing His will, which as we've seen is a life of humility and willingness to suffer. And third, when you repent of your sins you have complete forgiveness in Jesus Christ. Who are you? Now you know.

*Amen*