

You Are My Beloved
Oak Grove Presbyterian Church
January 7, 2018, Baptism of Our Lord
Mark 1:1-11 Bill Chadwick

This brief passage, the beginning of that briefest of gospels, Mark, raises so many thorny theological questions that biblical scholars could forge entire careers out of these 11 verses, and probably some have. Today let's simply focus on the heavenly declaration, "This is my Son, the Beloved."

Let us pair it with the statement in I John: "See how great a love the Father has bestowed on us, that we would be called children of God and such we are (3:1).

In his wonderful little book, *Cherry Log Sermons*, Fred Craddock writes, *One time I was conducting a chaplains' retreat at Fort Belvoir, Virginia. They treated me very well. I ate in the officers' mess, and the soldiers who waited on us wore sort of sad green fatigues. However, on their uniforms where normally a soldier would have a nametag, there was nothing. That name badge had been ripped off I said to the fellow waiting on me, a very nice young man, "I see you don 't have on your name tag. What's your name?" He didn't answer me. I said to the officer beside me, "Why didn't he answer? What's his name?"*

"H e doesn't have one, " the officer said.

"What do you mean? Give me a break here? What's his name?"

"He has no name," the officer repeated.

"Who are these people waiting on us?" I asked.

"Conscientious objectors."

This was during the Vietnam War, and these were conscientious objectors. They do not exist, they have no names, so eat your lunch. (p. 105)

Names. Names are so important to all of us, and they were especially significant in Bible times.

Some of you know my little brother. No, not John, my other little brother, LaMont, "Monty" for short. We became acquainted through Big Brothers when he was 10 and I was 18.

Monty had an incredibly rugged childhood . Now, when it came to the family I was born into, I won the lottery. Pure luck! Monty's family was at the other extreme in every conceivable way. The challenges he has overcome are astonishing . I'm so proud of him!

I brought him to church with me and from age 10 and he had a wonderful, nurturing experience in the Oak Grove family. After I went to seminary he had three more Big Brothers, all from Oak Grove. Church life was positive for him. The rest of life, not so much. School was horribly painful, as he was teased and bullied.

As a young man, seeking to distance himself from the persecution he had suffered, and to forge a new identity for himself, he changed his first name ... from LaMont to "Rex," "King."

I applaud that. It's kind of a shorthand version of I John. God loves us so much we are called children of God. Each one of us. A king, a queen. A Chinese proverb says, "The beginning of wisdom is to call things by their right name." You and I are children of God.

I just finished reading a new book entitled, *Barking to the Choir*, by Father Greg Boyle. It's a sequel to his astonishing book, *Tattoos on the Heart*, one of my top ten all-time favorite books. Anybody read it? *Tattoos on the Heart*. *Barking to the Choir* is equally amazing, heart-breaking, hilarious, inspiring. Father Greg Boyle has been working with Latino gangs in East Los Angeles for 30 years. He founded Homeboy Industries, starting out with a bakery to provide employment. It has evolved into the largest gang intervention, rehab, and re-entry program on the planet. Here's one of the

dozens of stories he relates,

A homie named Memo never knew his mom and dad and doesn't like to think about them, as it is too painful. After his parents died, he was raised by an aunt who was somewhat notorious in his neighborhood. She was killed when he was nine. He was once asked how old he was when he started (participating in violent gang activities).

"In the womb," he said sadly.

Memo is always on the search for his roots, thinking one moment that he is Japanese and convinced another moment that he's Jewish. He greets me every day with "Mazel tov." In a morning meeting once, I mentioned that God's nickname for God's people in the Old Testament was "God's delight." For days, Memo would greet people this way: "Good morning, God's delight." (pp. 143-44)

"God's delight."

For those of you who are parents or grandparents, I ask you, "Why do you love your children or grandchildren? Do you love them because they behave well? (Laughter) Or do you love them simply because they are your children, or grandchildren?"

So, too, we are loved simply because we are God's child. As Philip Yancey writes in his book, *Amazing Grace*, (another of my top ten), "There is nothing you can do to make God love you more and nothing you can do to make God love you less."

Friends, as a minister of the Gospel, I declare to you, you are "God's delight."

And so is everyone else ...and I mean every one: from that gang member to your annoying brother-in-law to Donald Trump and Kim Jong Un.

Another paragraph from Fr. Greg Boyle: "Knowing homies has changed my life forever, altered the course of my days, reshaped my heart, and returned me to myself. Together, we have discovered that we all are diamonds covered in dust. They have taught me not that I am somebody but that I am everybody." (Boyle)

We are all children of God. Therefore, we are all sisters and brothers. And, we are "God's delight."

Craddock reminds us that Luther said, "Remember your baptism." "Why did Luther say that? To make you feel guilty? 'Aha! You've strayed from your baptism.' No, no. Every one of us strays from our baptism. Everyone of us ... what Luther had in mind was this: Remember your baptism by claiming yourself to be a child of God ("God's delight") and by going about God 's business-serving other people." (Craddock, *Cherry Log Sermons*, p.11)

God's business, the business of love.

Amen?