

Identity: Christian

January 19, 2020

(Delivered January 26, 2020)

Matthew 3:13-17

Identity: It's more than just our name, our driver's license or social security numbers, and it's more than just the gender/sex we identify as. It's more than just a hot topic among theologians as to whether to use masculine pronouns, gender-neutral pronouns, or no pronouns at all in reference to God. Our identity serves as the very definition of who we are as a person, our likes and dislikes, our beliefs, and our affiliations. For example, I identify as a white male Christian nerd who believes pineapple belongs on pizza, but Katie identifies as a white female Christian nerd who believes pineapple should never go anywhere near pizza. Just out of curiosity, how many of you think pineapple can/should go on pizza? How many think pineapple should never go on pizza? How many don't know or don't care? Regardless, our identity is everything from personality to physiology to beliefs and more.

In all truth, our identities are the most sacred parts of us. They are something we protect, especially around tax season when identity theft is at its highest. One reason we do this actually stems out of the ancient belief that if you know someone or something's name, it's *true* name as it's referred to in literature, you can control it. This is the case when we're growing up. If you get your preferred name, that means the offense was minute if there was an offense at all. If you got full first name, you knew you'd done something wrong, but nothing too over the top. If you got full first and last names, you were in trouble and there was a stern reprimand waiting for you. If you got first, middle, and last names, that was your hint to run for the hills, because it was more than just a talking that you were about to be given. In short, identities are powerful things.

Now, why do I bring this up? I bring it up because today's reading, short though it might be, tells us who Jesus is, and therein helps us to understand who we are by extension. It tells us Jesus' identity in four different "identity markers." The first identity marker we are told about is by Jesus' being baptized in the first place. In baptism, we are made Children of God that we might be the hands, feet, voice, the very body of Christ in this world. We become the means by which God's will is done in this world. In a manner of speaking, baptism is a means of submission, a submission both to God and God's will, a promise to turn from Sin and to follow in Christ's footsteps. Sure enough, this is what Jesus is doing. While he doesn't need to be baptized to be forgiven for his sins, through this action, Jesus submits himself to the will of God, showing forth a willingness to even die for God and for the salvation of all humanity. However, it doesn't just stop there.

The second identity marker as to who Jesus is comes in the form of what he says to John the Baptist. Before John can oppose baptizing Jesus, he says to John, "Let it be so now; for it is proper for us in this way to fulfill all righteousness." The word "righteousness" in this case doesn't mean just having a strong moral and ethical being. Here, it's also in reference to the commandments, the rules God gave through Moses in guiding the tribes of Israel towards righteous living. Therefore, Jesus is not just "righteous" as we think of the word, but is the fulfillment of the commandments, the living embodiment of those 613 rules. Jesus isn't just a fulfillment of the commandments, though.

In this passage, we are also shown that Jesus is the fulfillment of that which has been foretold by the prophets. We see this in the action of the heavens opening up. In other words, that separation that has been in place between Heaven and Earth has been breached. Heaven and Earth are presently in one place at one time, something that has not been so since the Garden of Eden. We have here, essentially, a new Creation, a new beginning, whereby the relationship between Creator and created is reconciled. Therefore, Jesus is not just *a* savior, but is *the* Savior. Jesus is the means by which Creator and created will once again be reconnected and Heaven shall exist on Earth. So, thus far, we know Christ to be the human who fulfills both the commandments and the prophets by his total submission to the God of Abraham and of Jacob. It gets better, though.

Lastly, God confirms Jesus' identity by saying, "This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased." God only identifies Jesus twice in his ministry: first during Jesus' baptism and then during the Transfiguration. In both instances, God names Jesus as "my Son with whom I'm well pleased." So, not only has Jesus made the claim that, by being baptized, the God of Abraham and of Jacob is his God, but that same God has claimed Jesus as their own. What we have then is an established covenant within this action of being baptized, whereby we are forever and for always claimed as God's own.

This passage then, when we look at all the components, further identifies who we are as Christians. Whether by sprinkling or full immersion, whether as a baby or as an adult, all of us here identify as Christians. According to today's scripture reading, then, we come to a better understanding of just what this means. It means that just as we claim Jesus to be our Lord and Savior and the God of Jacob to be our God, that same God claims us as their own. It means that we enter a covenant whereby we promise to uphold God's statutes and commandments and to submit ourselves to God's will that we might be the body of Christ in the world. Baptism, in short, is one of the most sacred occurrences in a Christian's life, because it gives us an identity that cannot be stolen, nor can it be revoked. In Baptism, we are signed and sealed as God's own, now and always. Therefore, let us give thanks to a God of love who gives us our identity by claiming us as their own now and forever.