

Calvary United Methodist Church
January 12, 2020

THE LORD'S SERVANT
Rev. R. Jeffrey Fisher

Children's Message:

Matthew 3:16-17

I invite our children to come forward at this time. Wonderful, great to have you all here this morning! It feels like spring this morning, doesn't it? It's warm! And it was yesterday too. Who would believe 60 degrees in January?

Well, this morning is a day in the scriptures where it is called The Baptism of Jesus Day. It was just a few weeks ago that we celebrated his birth. The Bible can't report everything he did or the book would be so, so, so big because if we wrote what you did every day of your life it would be a lot of writing. It's a day that we celebrate as well what it was like when Jesus was touched by his Father to be baptized. Most of you probably have been baptized, some of you maybe not. Some people choose to be baptized later, but it's a special way of reminding us of God's blessings for us.

How many of you remember what baptism is? Do you know what happens then? You just saw one a short time ago. What do we do at baptism? (Child speaks) We say a few words and put water on top of the baby. That's pretty much it. The words are very important and so is the water. The words basically saying thank you to God for this new life and we are also asking God to bless this family, the parents, and siblings and to bless the child. And the water represents...what do we use water for? We drink it, it gives us life. (To clean us.) To clean us. And it's a symbol, God says, it's a symbol of our purity or becoming clean before God. And even when Jesus was perfect in every way, God wanted him to be baptized and cleaned up.

And so I want to read this scripture to you this morning from the Gospel of St. Matthew:

As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened. He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, whom I love and with him I am well pleased."

Every time I've seen that scripture, I feel happy because it reminds me of the new life. When we talk about new life, do you feel new today? I do, after I sleep, I feel like a new person every morning. Some days I feel more new than others, do you get those days? Can I make a confession to you this morning? I pick up our music director, Debbie, at 6:30 every Sunday morning. This morning I wondered why her house was dark. I looked at my watch and I'm sitting there at 5:30 a.m. So, I'm not as fresh as I ought to be this morning. And I didn't honk the horn, I wanted to let you know that.

But, when we sleep, we get rested and when we get cleaned up, when I get a shower after a

long day, I feel like a new person. It just makes me feel good and when I come here and I pray and I sing and I ask God to forgive me my sins and I ask God to help me that I might love other people, I feel like a new man. And that's a part of what this whole baptism thing is.

You know, at Christmas time we give gifts and at birthdays we give gifts, right? Most of us like to receive gifts and God said, when Jesus came, "This is my beloved Son and with him I am pleased, I am happy." And so it's like God is giving a gift to the world to simply say: Look, you are very special. And you know what I like? The day you were born, God said this, "These are my beloved children. I love them and you are a gift to the world."

Now we know our gifts are all different and I want to ask you, sometimes the gifts aren't the things we do, like some people are good in art or math or science, we've talked about those things. But sometimes it is just who you are. People say you are full of joy or you make them feel happy or you bring peace. I want to ask you this morning, can you tell me some things...what gift are you to the world and your family? Do you have any idea? And it will change throughout your life. What gifts do you think that God put in you? (Child speaks.) Joy...that's a wonderful gift and it makes other people happy. Others? What do you think God brings through you? (Children speak.) Happiness. Generosity. These are all wonderful gifts. Any others? It's hard, I'm not here to be overly pressure on you. (Child speaks.) Love. These are wonderful gifts. And some of the gifts are more than just those heartfelt things you shared. Some of them is, you know what, I have a gift of strength that I will help people whenever I can. Or I have a gift...some people here are really good with numbers and they help people with taxes and things like that.

The point is, everybody here has a different gift. I hope you ask yourself today: What is it that is my gift now at this point in my life? It changes and some of you, most of us actually, have many gifts. And God says: Can you use some of them for my Kingdom because when we bring, we talked about joy and we talked about love and we talked about generosity and all those kinds of things, love, when we bring that, it's like you are giving a gift: here's my love, here's my joy, here's my generosity, here's my faithfulness. And it makes God happy just like He said today, like was sung, He's a gift to the world and I am pleased, I want you to know that every morning God says: I love you, I'm so happy, I'm pleased with you. And I imagine most days you're parents say this same thing. They love you and they are proud of you, they are happy with you and I know I'm all those things too. I love you, and we are so glad you are here and we thank you for your faithfulness, we thank you that you share your joy and your generosity and love.

So, I want you to think as you go through today: I'm a gift and what is it that God wants me to do today? I want us all to think that. You are a gift from God because we are more than just a gift...we are a light. When we walk into a room when we can light it up just a little bit, it makes a lot of people happy.

So, there are snacks here for you today to take back and think about what gift you are to God's family. Thanks for coming up this week.

OLD TESTAMENT LESSON:

Our Old Testament Lesson today comes from the Prophet Isaiah, Chapter 42: 1 – 9. I don't know how you are about waiting. I'm not the most patient man in the world. This prophet wrote these words to a people who had abandoned their God. He wanted them to return to God. They were hurt, they were abused, they were oppressed. Remember how long they waited from this to the coming of Christ? 700 years. So, when you think: Oh, gosh, I haven't heard in a week...sounds kind of small.

(Isaiah, Chapter 42: 1 – 9)

Message:

Isaiah 42:1-9

I am the Lord's servant. Jesus Christ was predicted by many prophets, the Messiah, the One who is going to come to finally let the people know that God had not abandoned them, God had not forgotten them, that God was their God and they will be His people. And here we are today. And there are moments in our lives, in my life, and we wonder for a brief moment, where are you? I'm hurting right now. I'm confused right now. I'm lacking. I need something and I'm not getting it. And God says: Hold on. I am your God. He says: I will never leave you nor forsake you, but you have to open your eyes, you have to be open to the Spirit. I might appear to you in ways that you do not understand.

It's a matter of waiting. Wow, that's a hard request from God, isn't it? To learn to wait and be patient. Waiting takes on many forms and for me sometimes it is a desert form...you are waiting for...you know I remember those years when you are younger for the right employment opportunities, to get picked for the right teams, to be among the special friends. As we get older it is about waiting for the right relationships to bring us joy and it's waiting for wholeness.

Sometimes in relationships at work and family and friends it is also you are in the wilderness because you wonder: Lord, how long do I have to endure this pain? I've been broken so many times. Lord, can there be healing? Is there hope? Is there possibilities of a new future? Waiting can seem forever. Nine months for a new child. How long for relationships to bring healing? How long for peace in this world? Sometimes we look with awe and wonder and God says: Stand firm; I am with you. I will be your God and will not leave or forsake you. But sometimes you'll find you have these circumstances and other peoples. Sometimes we find God when we lose ourselves and our problems in assisting others by going to God instead of focusing on us.

As it was, this Prophet Isaiah came into the world at a time when the people were broken.

They had abandoned God, were unfaithful. And his plea to them was come back home. God has not forgotten you. You will find fullness; you will find strength; you will find hope; you will find glory. Comes home to God.

And you know, a lot of times those people as we as Children of God today, often feel that waiting is some sort of a punishment for us. We kind of do that sometimes to children, don't we? We put them in corners to wait to see if they learn a lesson. Geez. God's a parent and sometimes our time of waiting isn't a punishment. It's a time of thinking and reflection.

One of the greatest verses that I read to you was this. I get choked up thinking about it:

God says what? I will hold your hand.

I was holding hands with someone this week that's passing, twice. Yesterday a 47 year old. She's ready. She's at peace. You know how good it is to hold hands when you are going through a tough time? To know that someone is there for you? It's not someone of us, although that is important. It's that God is there. The peace that passes all understanding.

Both of these individuals, one is not understanding as much. How can I be losing my sight and going through my health problems and I can't get around and I can't do anything? And so I had to change the conversation one time. I said: Please, not judging you. Could we sit a moment and think differently? When we get older, in our 80s and 90s or maybe 50s and 60s or whatever age it is, can we count our blessings instead of our problems? When I was a kid we sang that song: Count your blessings, name them one by one, because when I do that, it changes everything from I'm sorry to thank you, God. I've never done without. You've healed up my broken body. You've healed my broken heart many times. It might be broken again now, and somehow I don't see it, but God I know you will heal it again. I know even with my health concerns, I know even in my financial concerns, I know in my relational concerns, God, You have not forgotten me. You are holding my hand, if I would just understand You.

"I, the Lord, have called you in righteousness; I will take hold of your hand. I will keep you and will make you to be a covenant to the people and a light for the Gentiles." I love that! God is with us every step of the way.

I remember what it was like as a child with my mother and father. You know when you are crossing the street and your mother and dad are holding your hand? That's 'cause I want you to be there safely. I remember when my mother would take me for my book bags and clothes every pre-September school and she would hold my hand as we would go into the stores to make sure I was safe and prepared and introduced. And God says, "I've got you. I've got your hand. I'm with you all the way. And I want you to open the eyes of the blind." God wants us to do these things on behalf of the Savior who is not with us physically. "From prison, released from the dungeon, those who sit in darkness. 'I am the Lord; that is my name.'"

He said: If you go and do these things, I am with you. You are not going alone. It is by my power.

And so, when we choose to say: Oh, I can't do anything, I have to say: Oh, Folks, let's take time to count our blessings and name them one by one. When we do, boy, we better have a lot of paper. Name them one by one.

Sometimes I think we look at our blessings and we just passed...you know Mr. Scrooge? All the blessing we have sometimes we think are they mine? Oh, these were hard lessons as a kid, when Mom would say you have to share? Was I the only one who had to go through that lesson? Now, you share with your sisters, your cousins. We have all these blessings and it's like we want to keep them.

Some of you still have the blessing of music. I cannot understand why you aren't up here yet. Some of you have other kinds of blessings, all of us, because we are gifts. God has created us as a gift to the Kingdom to fulfill the work of the Kingdom. And yet, we forget...we want to hold on and sometimes when we look at these words about justice and mercy, we forget that the justice would be at some point...I don't want justice, believe me. I want it for others, I don't want it for me. Justice is getting what I deserve. Do you want what you really deserve? I don't know of many people who want what they really deserve. We are partly responsible for the man on the cross, right? We've been reading that all our lives, because we sinned.

What I want is mercy. I want forgiven. I want a clean slate. I want a new start. I want new hope. I want a new beginning and everyone around us wants that and that means you and I need to work on that. You see, this scale called Master/Servant, justice and mercy, Jesus came and he flipped it. He was not the man anybody wanted. How about that? God sends him and it's not who we want. They wanted some powerful ruler and he came doing this stuff. If the disciples, no you can't do this, he said, then you can't be a follower of mine. Remember? He says to be one of my followers you are not about...James and John, remember? We want to sit at your right and left hand. Jesus said: that's not for me to make that decision.

We're here...it's not about our pride, it's not about our glory, not about our position. We are here to be servants. When we think about servants, and I've never seen "Downton Abbey" but some of you probably have seen that. A lot of people think of these as the people who are cleaning up their house, so you don't have to lift a finger. The meals are brought to you, everything is cleaned up. We all dream about that, right? It's not reality for most of us. But being a servant of God is understanding that there is a Master far above us and in finding the joy in serving...I've been at meetings, I think people know that when we sign up to do something at the church or at home or anywhere, now at home it's not a matter of whether you like it. Nobody likes to do the dirty jobs, but it's got to be done. But when we are serving God, it ought to bring joy to our heart or it's probably not where you ought to be serving.

There are some things that just deep down...what I used to hear about Mother Teresa and the Sisters of Mercy in India and all day long of every day they cleaned up the men and women who lived in the gutters, probably covered in feces and urine and garbage. I don't mean to be disgusting, but do you know what? When that is your calling it was done with love.

What is your calling? What is your calling for God? What is it, because you are called to something? Martin Luther King said this: Life's most persistent and urgent questions is "What are you doing for others?" Now, I take it a step further: What are you doing for God? What is it?

We are to a point in age and I will be preaching in about a month about Queen Esther, where we can't sit back. Queen Esther was in a position to save all of the Jews from death. We are at the point in the midst of struggling loss in congregations across America and across the globe when people are right. We cannot sit. As a Christian you are either doing what God calls us to do or we are fizzling out and dying. It's on all of our shoulders not some of them. What is it that you are called to by Almighty God? It might not be in the church. It might not be here. It might be leading the little league or Boy Scouts or Girl Scouts or some other program as a godly man or woman. But what are you called to do? There is no retirement in the Kingdom. You see a part of the struggle in the world today, the world looks through their glasses and they don't see Christ in us. They don't. You ask the young people why they don't...well, I see judgement, I see harshness, I see the unloving, unkindness. I don't see the forgiveness. So they are saying why would I want to be a part of that?

We need to be godly people. We need to be people that we are called to and that means we look like servants on both sides.

Now, this screen is a little better. Do you all know what that is? Tell me. (An apple.) I thought it looked like an apple too. And I like apples in a variety of forms covered with sugar and pie dough. I saw a new apple this week. How many of you want to eat that apple? I'm told it is a hybrid from Japan, who knows, it's on the web, who knows if it is true or fake, but as I looked at that and I looked at this, I say in my mind it's what an apple ought to be, the red one. The blue one doesn't cut it for me.

That was the world when Jesus came around. They were waiting for a high and mighty man who was going to come with power and might, put down our oppressors, knock them down. You know what we say? Knock them down, drive them out, obliterate, hurt them, harm them. Then Jesus came as a lamb and they weren't sure. They weren't sure that they wanted that lamb, just as I'm not sure I'd want that blue apple. You see, the power of Jesus Christ is a power to clean us up and make us so different that the world will say: Wow! I want that peace, that love, those things that our young children shared this morning: joy and peace and hope and love. Boy, we could shine them every day in their life.

The second part of Isaiah 42: Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen one in whom I delight; I will put my Spirit on him and he will bring nations to justice. He will not shout or cry out or raise his voice in the streets. A bruised reed he will not break and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out.

Here was this Jesus. We don't know what he looked like, but what we do know about him, he was the one who went to the woman everyone was judging and said: today you will be a new woman and you will find new life and you will draw from a spring of water that will never run dry.

When the others around him told him to get away from the kids and said: scatter children! He's too busy to deal with you. He did what? He sat down and said: you must be like one of them to get to the Kingdom of Heaven.

And they were going by the pool in Bethesda there was a blind man there and there was a handicap person there. And they said: Lord, we don't have time for this. They were asking whose sin was it, his father's or his or whatever and he said: No, we are going to bring some healing here today.

You see, everything that the disciples wanted wasn't the kind of man Jesus was. We think the church struggles with that today. He went to the cross because he wanted to show us what was to fully give yourself to something. What is it that you are fully giving yourself too? What is it that we are called to? You see, I find myself, I'm only speaking for me, it's a lot easier to make sure I do what I want, not necessarily what God wants. And the kingdom is not coming when I'm doing what I want all the time. At some point I have to ask God: what is it that I need to be doing for your Kingdom?

He never said that following him would be easy. Going to the cross wasn't an easy thing. Serving in difficult places and situations isn't always easy, and we have plenty of them in our families, among our friends and among our coworkers and yet God says: I'm expecting you to make a difference. I'm expecting you to be a gift just in those situations.

His ways are not the ways of the world. I love these notes from Proverbs:

The way of fools seems right to them, but the wise listen to advice.

Sometimes we do not listen wisely to the Word of God and understand that it can make a huge difference when we find out not the world's ways, but God's ways.

This being the Baptism of the Lord, remember when he said to John: I want you to baptize me. And John said: I can't do it. And he said: Well, then you can have no part of me. He says: We need to start this and again, I shared with the children, when I see this image and hear that word that the dove descended and God said: I am with you today, that was clearly a

promise from the Prophet Isaiah and other promises that were made saying the one is to come that is going to change your world.

So when we get the idea that we've been abandoned, I want you to know this: God said: I will never fail you. I will never abandon you. Those symbols, the sign of the dove, the sign of the baptism and the sign of the cleaning up is the sign of the presence of God, but we don't see God because we are not looking correctly. We have in our own mind what God's presence ought to look like in our life instead of seeing God right where we are.

Some years ago I was called by our General Board to pick up someone at an airport and she happened to be speaking here in the Harrisburg area I believe somewhere before she spoke in New York. She didn't know me, she was an old retired school superintendent from down in Atlanta. I said: I'll pick you up. How will I know you are the airport? She didn't know Harrisburg's a fairly small one. I said: I'll have a trench coat, dark sunglasses and a briefcase. Well, I don't know if you can see it up here or not, she chuckled and I said: You'll find me, it will be no problem.

The greatest problem we have today is that our image of Christ is still a lot different than being a servant. Understand that. We want someone to be the Christ that we want, not the Christ that is. Our Christ was one who gave it all.

“Where is the wise person? Where is the educated person? Where is the philosopher of our times? God has made the wisdom of the world foolish.”

We've lost it...we've tried to have all these other solutions and God says: Let me give you the real wisdom: It's to be a servant who loves thy God.

I am glad we are called to this, to be a servant to not just our family, not just our friends, not just this church but of the world. And we have to the eyes of Jesus on our eyes. I started thinking about what it's like if you and I were God. Would we make the son look like this, some clean cut person? For sure we would. If he had a lip ring, long hair, and who know what kind of dress, that can't be our Savior, right? Right? We have our images of who our Jesus is. I'm going to tell you who Jesus is. Jesus is the Son of the Most High God. He's the one who rules the world with justice, but he is the one who brings mercy. His desire is about wholeness that you and I understand that we are not the judges of this world; that rather than judge, I don't want to be miserable and God says this to us every day. I don't know about you, I judge me more than anybody. Do you ever have those nights you sleep and you roll and you roll and you roll and kind of think: Oh, I should have done this and I could have done this and why did I do this and why did I say that? Oh, that's a lot of us. And God says this: Don't be miserable. Enjoy My Mercy! You are forgiven! In the name of Jesus Christ, you are forgiven! I say that to you right now.

We have new life. He says: I went to this cross that you might be forgiven and you I know,

don't worry. I've got you covered. How's that for insurance? I'm your God. And when we get too high and mighty...I remember years ago on the list: preacher is going to talk about the top 100 sins and everyone filled the church because they were wondering what they were missing. We all want to judge somebody that doesn't do what we do, right? Listen to what God says: I died for all people, the ones that you don't like, the people with all these sexuality issues, all these issues that we are fighting and wrestling and who's there and who's out and God says: I don't know about you, but they are my children. Not everybody knows they are my children. Not everybody always lives the way I want them to live. If there is anyone who always lives the way God wants us to live, I want you to stand right now, I want to see bold you can be on that. That's what I thought. He said: We are all in need for forgiveness and I am the God who died for all of you. I come not as the judge, but I come as the healer. I come to remake. I come as the one to give new life and new hope and new purpose and new meaning. I went to the cross that you might have life and have it abundantly. Can we live abundantly? Can we live with joy? Can we live with grace and mercy and peace? Can we be the people who become the servants God wants us to be, because when we do that, our world will be filled with peace, a peace that passes all understanding, a peace that I desperately need and I suspect you do and I know the broken world around us needs this peace, for us to learn to love one another.

We will never understand everyone around us. Is there sin? Oh, there is sin. We've all got our sins, but God says: I am bigger than that. I want you to live in me. So, I pray this day that we will ask that the Spirit in us, to fill us, to complete us, to be the people we ought to be. Amen.