



One Page Sermon

By Pastor Robb McCoy

January 7, 2024

Identity. Belonging. Purpose.

Recap of sermon from January 7, 2024

Scripture: Mark 1:4-15

For the last several months the confirmation class met with myself and Autumn Glass. We focused on the book *Three Big Questions That Shape Your Future*, by Kara Powell, Kristel Acevedo, and Brad Griffin. The three big questions were:

1. Who are you?
2. Where do you belong?
3. What difference do you make?

Identity. Belonging. Purpose. Three are three vital questions for young people to answer. I might argue they are three vital questions for anyone to answer. We spent each week looking at different aspects of these questions and reflecting on how Christ and the Church fits into the answer.

Confirmation is about transformation, not information. Yes, we talked about some practical matters of the United Methodist Church and what membership means. We talked about the details of the vows they would take and helped translate the historic questions into more understandable terms. We also talked about family, dating, making mistakes, perfectionism, anxiety, service, friendships and mission.

We asked questions, laughed, and wondered together. We found a group verse that reflected our belonging and purpose “Carry each other’s burdens so as to fulfill the law of Christ” (Galatians 6:2). We talked about what that meant to each other. We prayed for each other during the week.

On Sunday ten young people stood before the congregation and answered historic questions of faith and dedication to Christ. For some, they confirmed the promises that were made on their behalf when they were much younger. One young person decided for herself to go under the waters of baptism. Their first act after confirmation and baptism was sharing the bread and cup of Communion. They shared in the promise of Christ, and they were united in Christ’s baptism, ministry, and resurrection.

Christ’s baptism is one of the great mysteries of our faith. It feels backwards. It did then—to John, the writers of the gospels, and probably even the earliest Christians; and it does to us now. Why would Jesus be baptized? It feels like he should be the one doing the baptizing. That however, is because we are thinking about it wrong. We can’t help but think of baptism in typical power dynamics. We feel like the baptizer is the leader and the baptized is the follower.

But that’s wrong. That’s the way the world works. That’s not how Christ’s Kingdom works. Baptism is not about enforcing power dynamics.

Baptism is about these same three questions that we have been discussing. It is about identity, belonging, and purpose. Jesus was baptized because he needed the same affirmation that we all need.

The Gospels of Mark and Luke agree. The voice from heaven: “You are my Son, whom I dearly love. In you I find happiness.” This is directed at Jesus. This is about identifying Jesus as God’s Son. It is a reminder to Jesus of who and whose he is. The Holy Spirit descends upon him and empowers him to share the good news. Immediately from baptism he goes to the wilderness to prepare and then finds his first disciples to start sharing the good news of God’s Kingdom.

When we are baptized, it is no different. It’s not about the one doing the baptism. It’s not about the amount of water or even the age of the one who is being baptized. The action of baptism is one-direction. It is God declaring “You are my beloved. In you I find happiness.” This is the beginning of our identity. It is the beginning of our belonging. It is the beginning of our purpose.

There may be other things that come along. When I look at our confirmation class I see incredible leaders. I see curious learners. I see passionate advocates for justice. I see kindness. I see their will to do hard things, and their courage to persist in working for equality. I see a group that cares about each other, wants to carry each other’s burdens and celebrate each other’s victories without jealousy.

But at the heart of who they are, at the heart of who you are, and at the heart of who Jesus is, is this:

You are a beloved child of God. In you God finds happiness. Now go and share the good news with those who do not know who they are.



The Baptism of Christ (Verrocchio & Leonardo) c. 1470. Wikimedia commons.

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