

**NEW TESTAMENT READING: Luke 3:15-17, 21-22 pg 60 NT**

5 As the people were filled with expectation, and all were questioning in their hearts concerning John, whether he might be the Messiah, 16 John answered all of them by saying, “I baptize you with water; but one who is more powerful than I is coming; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. 17 His winnowing fork is in his hand, to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his granary; but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.”... Now when all the people were baptized, and when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, the heaven was opened, 22 and the Holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, “You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.”

**OLD TESTAMENT READING: Isaiah 43:1-7 672 OT**

But now thus says the LORD, he who created you, O Jacob, he who formed you, O Israel: Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine. <sup>2</sup>When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you. <sup>3</sup>For I am the LORD your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior. I give Egypt as your ransom, Ethiopia and Seba in exchange for you. <sup>4</sup>Because you are precious in my sight, and honored, and I love you, I give people in return for you, nations in exchange for your life. <sup>5</sup>Do not fear, for I am with you; I will bring your offspring from the east, and from the west I will gather you; I will say to the north, “Give them up,” and to the south, “Do not withhold; bring my sons from far away and my daughters from the end of the earth—<sup>7</sup>everyone who is called by my name, whom I created for my glory, whom I formed and made.”

### ***“Named and Claimed”***

Probably everyone has a story, somewhere in their family treasure box of stories...one like ours....one that seems to get richer as the years go by, that is retold over and over again at those family gatherings. Probably everyone has a story like it because it's about naming and claiming, and such things are important. Through them, we learn who and whose we are, we learn what may be most important in life.

We were living in Georgia at the time, and I worked at a Children's hospital. I was probably about 7-8 months pregnant and getting concerned that our little family, my husband, Mike, our 4- year old, Joel, and I had not yet settled on a name for the coming baby. It's not an easy thing to do. So many things to consider... what will their initials spell? what nicknames might be created by future classmates?, will the name serve them when they're 50 as well as 5?, will virtuous qualities be encouraged, no famous traitors or serial killers with the same name? I was beginning to be concerned that our baby was going to be born with a one of those blue nametags on his bassinet that I saw so frequently, a nametag with simply "Babyboy" on it. I wanted a name on that bassinet, a place for my son to belong. So, I'd been recently beginning a discussion at every dinnertime about names. Usually the conversation devolved into silliness, however. We all do have pretty weird sense of humors. Maybe we needed some suggestions to choose from I thought. So, since it was a tradition in my own family to use Biblical names, we agreed we could look through the Bible and choose a good name from there. Mike and Joel readily took on the assignment together. Of course, the names that came back were ridiculous, ridiculously long like Mathusaleh, Mephiboseth or Maher-shalal-hash-baz or names that were just plain ridiculous, like Phutt, Ichabod, Ham, or Pual. Seriously! Of course, there was always their favorite fallback...Pugsly. My worry and frustration mounted.

But not long. I soon discovered the perfect name! One of my nurse friends had a baby and named him, Ian. "It's Gaelic for John, and Ingrim is Gaelic too" At least we thought so. Our baby could be Ian Michael! He would have a bit of his heritage and his father right there in his name! I was excited to be able to announce my idea to Mike and Joel at dinner. And when I did there seemed initially to be some acceptance. Yes! That was it, then! Ian Michael Ingrim. But then

Joel, began to say, “Ian”. “Ian,”. He repeated it several times, pondering it in his little 4 yr old mind, rolling it over and over again in mouth. And then, he, who had learned to talk, you see, in the South, in Texas and Georgia, said, “Mama, is my brother’s name going to be Ian, like you go ‘ian a dor?’” Ughhh. Needless to say, Mike ended up picking Nathan Michael Ingrim’s name when he was in the L&D waiting room, alone. I loved it, and was so happy to know that it was on the bassinet when our baby son was first laid safe and secure there.

Yes, names are important. They do more than identify us. Whether we know it or not, they are undergirded with the hopes and dreams of someone who has named us, and they tell us who and whose we are. “They are,” as one preacher has pointed out, “symbols of love.”<sup>1</sup> That’s what the prophet, Isaiah, knew, when he wrote approximately 2600 years ago to a people in exile, a people enslaved and beat down, miles from their beloved homeland, a people struggling to remember who they were, “*Do not fear, for I have redeemed you: I have called you by name, you are mine.*” *When you pass through the waters, I will be with you. When you walk through fire you shall not be burned.... I have called you by NAME, you are mine.*”

Similarly, when Jesus stepped into the Jordan river to be baptized by John about 2000 years ago, he was made to know the same. When he was about 30, just prior to the beginning of his ministry, his ministry to a hurting, broken and lost world which so needed a Savior, he was given the gift of knowing who he was and to whom he belonged. “*And the Holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, “You are my Son, the Beloved.”* I imagine him there standing in the river, up to his ankles in mud, soaking wet, water running down his face, tears running down his cheeks. I imagine that as he looked to the sky and prayed, he saw the dove and heard the voice and knew. He knew the powerful love of God, the God who claimed him as Son and called him, “Beloved”.

This knowing deeply and fully who and whose we are is what William Sloane Coffin says is being “grasped by the power of love unending.”<sup>2</sup> It is what we celebrate in our own baptisms when we go or when someone carries us to the font and another dunks us or sprinkles us or pours

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<sup>1</sup> John Buchanan. “*Grasped by the Power of Love*” <http://www.fourthchurch.org/sermons/2004/011104.html?print=true>. (accessed 1/11/2019).

<sup>2</sup> William Sloane Coffin. *Credo*. (Louisville: WJKP; 2004), 7.

water over our heads and, with the sign of the cross, affirms, “ *Nathan Michael, Katherine Ann, Marian Ruth... 'You are a child of God and you belong to Jesus Christ forever.'*” Grasp by the power of love unending. Think of that. Knowing that we are grasped, that we are held tightly, that we lay safe and secure (not in a basonette) but in the palm of God’s hand, never to be let go, not in this life or the life to follow...what effect does that have on us? What does knowing that we belong completely, every ounce of us claimed, owned, spoken for, by the Almighty God, by the One, the Master of the Universe do? Think of it...knowing that we are beloved, adored, treasured, valued more than life itself, for indeed He died for us....what effect does it have?

Well, it has the effect that it had on Jesus as he came up out of the water, took a deep breath and drew the confidence and courage to go forward, to face it all, even death. Friends, knowing that there is One much greater than us who is holding us fast can’t help but give us the strength to face the trials and dangers and the evils of this world with more boldness and confidence. We can face even the very darkest and lowest points without being overwhelmed with fear. *One time, when I was visiting a couple in their home to offer them some pastoral care (the husband had been recently diagnosed with terminal cancer), I was privileged to hear them planning something remarkable. While there was great sadness in the room, there was, there was also excitement because they were planning to have a gathering, a party, in which all their friends and family would be invited. They were putting together their shopping lists. They figured they’d eat and drink, maybe a lot, and tell stories of their times together. They knew they’d laugh and cry some too. But mostly, what they were excited about was the opportunity for people to say the things that they wanted to say, to say the things that otherwise they’d regret they didn’t get a chance to say when they’d come to the funeral. I remember thinking as I left...what could be more important as one faces the great foe than to be reminded of how much you are loved.<sup>3</sup> Grasp by the power of love ending....the effect it has!*

The other effect that our being named and claimed by God, is that we are freed to love. We are freed to love...in return. We become released from our self-focus and we can, we are

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<sup>3</sup> Pastoral visit. 2018. Brought to my recollection by Buchanan. “*Grasped by the Power of Love*” (Note: I cannot recall the name given to this funeral alternative, the pre-funeral party).

compelled, in fact, to love God and the things God loves! And there's such power, such transforming, redemptive power in love. Love can help and heal WHEN nothing else can. Love can lift up and show the way for living AS nothing else can. Love can indeed change the world. And that is Jesus' plan I believe. *"The late French Jesuit, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, was a scientist, a priest, a theologian, and a true mystic. His was a truly great mind. He once said that the discovery and harnessing of fire is one of the great scientific and technological discoveries of human history. Fire, to a great extent, made human civilization possible. Fire made it possible to cook food, thereby reducing the spread of disease. Fire made it possible to stay warm in cold climates, thereby making human migration around the world feasible. Fire made for the Bronze Age, the Iron Age, the Industrial Revolution. The advances of science and technology are greatly dependent on the human capacity to take fire and use it for human good. If you drove here this morning, you did so in part because of harnessed fire. Fire makes it possible for us to call, text, tweet, email, and be socially functional (and lately dysfunctional) with each other. De Chardin knew all of this, but he also knew, (and I quote) 'if humanity ever captures the energy of love, then for the second time in the history of the world, we will have discovered fire.'"*<sup>4</sup>

Ahhh. It is for this reason, friends that the ordination and installation of elders is always a task that is coupled with the celebration of the Baptism of the Lord in the Church. Today, those ruling elders who come to be installed are responding to their baptismal call to serve...to serve with the sacrificial love freed up in them as a result of their coming to know the grasp of God's love unending. They have been recognized by this congregation for their gifts of leadership. They are spiritually mature, committed to Presbyterian principles of government, and they love the Lord and his Church. They have previously received officer training and have been examined and approved by Session. They do not have "special or higher" qualities, or in ordination are being placed "above" or "better". Rather, through their ordination/installation promises, they have grounded themselves in a posture of servitude and they pledge to support us, and to guide Christ's

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<sup>4</sup> Quoted by Bishop Michael Curry. <http://time.com/5283953/royal-wedding-sermon-transcript/> (accessed 1/12/19).

church, in our service of others...in all of our service of others, others who need to hear for themselves, “*Do not fear. I have called you by name. You are mine,*” says the Lord. Amen.

As we sing the 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> verses of Baptized in Water, I ask ruling elders, Kathy Lopez and Marian Harrison to come forward.