

Menifee United Church of Christ

Established in 1962 by God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit

SERMON FOR

January 11, 2015

“You Are God’s Child, The Beloved”



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Menifee United Church of Christ

Sunday Service and Sunday School 10 AM

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Live Life Fully Alive!

Psalm 29:8-11

The voice of the LORD shakes the wilderness; the LORD shakes the wilderness of Kadesh. The voice of the LORD causes the oaks to whirl, and strips the forest bare; and in his temple all say, 'Glory!' The LORD sits enthroned over the flood; the LORD sits enthroned as king forever. May the LORD give strength to his people! May the LORD bless his people with peace!

Mark 1:9-11

In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. And a voice came from heaven, 'You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.'

"You Are God's Child, The Beloved"

Two religious scholars are talking. One religious scholar says to the other religious scholar, "Did you know that a car is mentioned in the Bible?" The other religious scholar says, "No way. There's no car mentioned in the Bible." The first religious scholar says, "Oh yes there is. It's mentioned right there in the book of Genesis. It says, 'God drove Adam and Eve out of the Garden of Eden in a Fury.'"

You Are God's Child, The Beloved. That's what I want to talk with you about today. Today the church celebrates the baptism of Jesus. Jesus' baptism should remind us of our own baptism, for those of us who were baptized.

I wasn't baptized until I was in seminary. I have to be the only unbaptized person ever to attend seminary. I took a sacraments class, where we studied communion and baptism. I thought: Have I ever been baptized? So I called my mom and asked her. She said I went to a church that didn't believe in infant baptism, so unless I was baptized as an adult, I'd never been baptized. So I went to my teaching church where I was doing an internship and said to the pastor, "I don't think I've ever been baptized. I suppose if I'm going to be a Christian minister, I should be baptized." With all the compassion he could muster, he said,

“Well, duh.” Then he wondered when I wanted to be baptized, did I have a special date or something. I said, “No, let’s just do it this Sunday.”

I woke up that Sunday, looked at the calendar, and said, “Oh my goodness. It’s December 7. Pearl Harbor Day.” Some of you may know that I felt called to the ministry on my birthday in 2001. My birthday is 9/11. And now I was going to be baptized on December 7, Pearl Harbor Day. My teaching church wanted me to say something before I was baptized. So I said, “I hope that my birthday, 9/11, and my baptism day, December 7, mean that my ministry will always be about justice and peace.’ That’s the story of my baptism. What’s yours?”

The point I want to make today is this: The love that God had for Jesus when he was baptized, God has for us.

A woman came to my office years ago in tears. She told me she belonged to another church. She told me she went to her clergy person and asked if he would baptize her son, who was born near death. She told me her clergy person told her he would baptize her son, when she started coming to church more and when she gave more money to the church. In tears she asked me if I would baptize her son and when. I asked her, “Is this Sunday soon enough?” That Sunday I did baptize her son and her two other kids as well. Afterwards I told her she had to attend church more and she had to give more money to the church. No! That’s not true! I didn’t do that! But after that, her kids would wake their parents up every Sunday and say, “Come on! Let’s go to church! We gotta go see Pastor Bill.”

I baptized a baby once and she didn’t look at me or at her parents. She looked up at the ceiling. But it seemed to me like she was looking beyond the ceiling, like she was looking up at heaven. At the angels? At Jesus? At God? I think baptism is a blessed, sacred, holy time; where maybe we entertain angels unawares.

Mark tells us that Jesus was baptized by John the Baptist in the Jordan. And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens open up, and the spirit of God descended like a dove on him. And a voice came from heaven, saying, “You are my

Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.” Then in Matthew we read the Great Commission. Jesus tells his followers, “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.”

A seminary professor told us: You have to baptize in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Otherwise, it’s not a legitimate baptism. He told us that because some progressive pastors have a tendency to want to avoid those kinds of gender-specific, male names. Instead, they want to say: I baptize you in the name of the Creator; I baptize you in the name of the Redeemer; and I baptize you in the name of the Sustainer. I don’t do that. But I do try to broaden the words of baptism a little bit. I say: I baptize you in the name of the Father, who is a Mother to us all; I baptize you in the name of the Son, who is a brother to us all; and I baptize you in the name of the Holy Spirit, who is a connection to us all. Then I say: I believe I hear a voice coming from heaven, saying, “You are my Child, the Beloved, with you I am well-pleased.”

God does love us and God is well-pleased with us. That’s why the Psalmist says, “May the Lord give strength to God’s people! May the Lord bless God’s people with peace!” Baptism is a time to be reminded that God loves us, that God strengthens us, and that God blesses us with peace.

At a baptism, I say the same thing, whether I baptize a two-year-old or a 92-year old. I don’t ask the person being baptized to say anything, to make any kind of commitment, to promise anything to God. What’s a baby going to say? Instead, I ask the people in the church to make a promise to God. I say: Baptism is a sacred covenant that needs community commitment. So I ask the people gathered here: Do you promise to encourage, support, and help this Child of God along the spiritual path from here to eternity? If so, say: We do.

Alison Krauss had a hit song a few years ago. “Down To The River To Pray.” It was featured in the wonderful movie, “Oh Brother, Where Art Thou?” Alison Krauss sings, “As I went down to the river to pray: Studying about that good old way. And who shall wear the starry crown? Good Lord, show me the

way.” It’s a song about baptism. And I think it’s sung at many baptisms. What is baptism? Baptism is when the church declares to a congregant: You are not just a child of creation. You are a child of God. You are made in the image of God. You are blessed by God.

Now I know there are some preachers, teachers, and theologians who say: You are a worthless worm to God. You are a piece of garbage to God. You are an ugly bug to God. Nothing could be further from the truth! You are a holy soul to God! You are a sacred spirit to God! You are a blessed saint to God! God did not create you to hate you! God created you to love you! You are God’s Child, the Beloved! With you, God is well pleased! That is the Good News!

Let us pray...

*God of Love,
Help us to see that you love us.
Help us to know that you love us.
And help us to accept that you love us.
Now and forevermore.
By the power of the Holy Spirit.
And in the name of Jesus.
Amen.*

LIVE LIFE FULLY ALIVE!

*“Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth.
Worship the Lord with gladness;
come into God’s presence with singing.”*

Hello, and welcome home to Menifee United Church of Christ. Our goal is to help you Live Life Fully Alive! We’re so happy you’re here. St. Irenaeus, an early church leader, said nearly 2,000 years ago, “The glory of God is a human being fully alive.” Maybe he was paraphrasing Jesus who said, “I came that they may have life, and have it more abundantly.”

To Live Life Fully Alive! means to live in awareness of your body, mind, and spirit: to be aware of the senses of your body (seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting and touching); to be aware of the thoughts and feelings of your mind; and to be aware of the spirit within, around, and above you. When God made us in God’s image, God intended us to Live Life Fully Alive! We do that by helping everyone, forgiving everyone, and loving everyone, including ourselves.

At the end of our service I do an “Alter Call.” I don’t call people to the altar. I call people to alter their lives for the better, by answering these questions...

Do you believe in God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit? And do you promise to share the love of God, to follow the teachings of Jesus, and to listen to the Holy Spirit? If so say, I do.

Then I say: Now go and alter the world for the better! And Live Life Fully Alive! And help others to Live Life Fully Alive!

*“God bless you and keep you
God’s face shine upon you, and be gracious to you;
God’s countenance be lifted up upon you,
and give you peace.”*



*Menifee
United Church of Christ*



*Whoever you are,
Wherever you are on life's journey
You are welcome here!*

*Jesus didn't reject people
Neither do we*



THE GOLDEN RULE

*What is hateful to you
do not do to others.*

Judaism

*Do to others what you would
have them do to you.*

Christianity

*None of you believes until he wishes for his
brother what he wishes for himself.*

Islam

*Do not do to others
what would cause pain if done to you.*

Hinduism

*Hurt not others in ways that you yourself
would find hurtful.*

Buddism

*Regard your neighbor's gain as your gain,
and your neighbor's loss as your loss.*

Taoism

*Do not do to others
what you do not want them to do to you.*

Confucianism

*Treat other people
as you'd want to be treated in their situation.*

Humanism