

WELCOME 14 January 2018 2 Epiphany '18 B

Mark 1:4-11

Good morning! Welcome to worship today! It is great to have you here this morning. Please stay for morning tea after worship so we can get a chance to know one another better...

For some people it's their house...their castle...or their "castle"

For others...maybe it's their car or cars.

For still others it's their work they are known by what they do.

Maybe for someone else it would be their family tree...their name...their relational legacy. Some names carry more baggage than others...

However it happens, it's almost always an answer to the question, "Who are you?" Our everyday lives reflect the working definition of who we think we are...our identity. Sometimes it's subconscious & reflects the belief that: 'I am what I do' or 'I am what others say about me', or 'I am what I have' or 'I am who I'm related to.'

But what if who you are is defined solely by who Jesus is & what he has already determined about you?

What if your pursuit of an identity out here (acquire achieve accumulate associate) could be replaced by an identity grounded in love that accepts & values you with no strings attached? What if your identity was found in a person – One who is love?

That's the gift that is yours again today as we discover, "Jesus is the One who is Love". He is the one who is the love of the Father made flesh for you – for me – for all.

Jesus Christ - the light of the nations, the hope of the world, the Saviour who comes for all...is Love.

We'll explore & experience that together today!

LWKids is on holidays & will restart around the beginning of the school year.

If you'd like to be part of that team leading our kids...see me today!

PRAYER OF THE DAY

Eternal God, the refuge and help of all your children, we praise you for all you have given us, for all you have done for us, for all that you are to us.

In our weakness, you are strength, in our darkness, you are light, in our sorrow, you are comfort and peace.

We cannot number your blessings, we cannot declare your love:

For all your blessings we bless you.

May we live as in your presence, and love the things that you love, and serve you in our daily lives; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

~ St. Boniface (ca. 672-754)

2 Epiphany '18 B – WHO IS JESUS? THE ONE WHO IS LOVE

- FAITH CHAT:**
1. What are some things that are “uniquely you”? identify you as you?
 2. What would prevent someone from living their identity as God’s child?

When my dad retired after spending 42 years working for the Southern Pacific RR it was hard for him. His entire adult life had been spent immersed in the transportation industry. From checking car numbers in the freezing rain/sweltering Tx heat/humidity; to overseeing the transfer of containers from truck to rail & vice versa. It was what he knew like the back of his hand. He would never have said “I am the railroad.” But like many of us (& particularly many men) a huge piece of his identity was wrapped up in his work & for 42 years that was the SP.

My dad was not unusual in that regard. Maybe you know a person who retired & found their new status took some getting used to...maybe haven't gotten used to it yet? We see it all the time in many professions. Athlete who moves from the playing field to the coaches' box or the TV booth. The movie star who steps behind the camera to direct when the wrinkles/paunches/thin hair can't be hidden by make-up/costuming. Or they go on “I'm a Celebrity Get me out of Here!” prove they've still got it!

Years ago I read a little book by Gary Smalley...The Blessing. The backstory of the book is simple but the implications are huge. In the OT book of Genesis, Jacob & Esau are the twin sons of Isaac/Rebekah (Isaac is the only son of Abe/Sarah – promised by God – conduit of blessing to the world) Jacob tricks Dad/Isaac w/ Mom's help into blessing him as the 1st born son. He jumps the queue ahead of Esau his older brother & steals the family blessing (approval affirmation endorsement) of Isaac while Esau is away carrying out a command from their dad that once complete will get him rightfully blessed. Jacob is a con artist of the highest order & gets the goodies while Esau's back is turned.

But every good con eventually gets discovered, & when Esau finds out what Jacob did you can feel his heart break: *When Esau heard his father's words; he let out a loud & bitter cry. “Oh my father, what about me? Bless me, too!” he begged...Oh, haven't you saved even one blessing for me?...But do you have only one blessing? Oh my father, bless me, too!” Then Esau broke down and wept.* Simple backstory...huge implications Smalley contends, I believe rightly, that every human being longs for that blessing. He says human sin makes us hungry for endorsement – approval – blessing – validation - affirmation...Sin is the open festering wound of self-interest/self-centeredness we all carry & it makes us hungry for blessing...and we'll do anything to get it. We'll do anything to prove ourselves worthy of endorsement – approval – blessing – validation – affirmation.

I've just started reading another book...not far into it so I can't say much about it except that Leonie said I should read it & as a dutiful husband whatever my wife tells me to do I do with all haste. “Jump” How high? But in the intro to the book it poses an interesting thought experiment: Picture yourself in high school. Whatcha got? Awkward. Socially not cool. Not athletic really. US high schools back then used to have these self-worth destroying popularity contests where students would vote on things like “most likely to succeed” “class favourites” “most attractive” – Each category would lift up a girl/guy winner...which means the rest of us were what? 625 kids in my graduating class...do the math

But here's the cool part...even though we are older now & are different in many ways from that picture back then...deep down we are not that far from that insecure kid we were...Why? Because it was that younger you who formed your beliefs attitudes assumptions about who you are & what you can do. So every stuff up. Every knock back. Every kick in the teeth...reinforced something you might to this day believe about who you are. I will never be enough – Someone is always doing better – I have to work harder – I can't measure up. Every human being longs for that blessing endorsement – approval – validation – affirmation & we'll do anything to get it. We'll do anything to prove ourselves worthy....because so much tells us we're not.

Our everyday lives reflect the working definition of who we think we are...our identity Sometimes it's subconscious & reflects the belief that: 'I am what I do' or 'I am what others say about me', or 'I am what I have' or 'I am who I'm related to.' We'll do anything to prove ourselves worthy.

It's funny...I heard someone speculate that it would be interesting if God would let us have it all ...wealth fame success beauty all by the world's standards early in life so we could experience the true emptiness & lack of fulfilment & vacuum of discontent having it all brings. Which is interesting because I saw in the news this week that Amazon.com founder Jeff Bezos is probably the richest man who has ever lived on the planet. \$106bn USD (106+9 0s) 2 things – 1 I have more hair than he does – 2 he, just like me, will one day breathe his last breath on this planet...106bn or 2006bn he is going to die just like me with far fewer \$\$\$ in my pocket. Everything we gain in this world we leave behind...He will leave this earth & not 1 of those \$\$ will go w/ him.

But What if who you are is not yours to decide? What if your identity is a gift? What if you are already bathed in blessing? Awash in approval? Saturated in validation? Drenched in affirmation? Soaked in endorsement?

“You are my dearly loved Son, you bring me great joy.”

But wait...John that's about Jesus that's not me...Oh yes it is. Jesus came fully engaged in our lives & took onto his own back our need for redemption – renewal – release – restoration. He steps down into the Jordan's muddy water because w/o him we're toast...dead in our sin - dead in our brokenness - dead in our hopelessness - dead in our self-helplessness...like Esau weeping for what we took for granted until it was lost forever. Jesus takes into himself all of us & nails it to the cross so that when he walks free from the grave he gives to us all of himself & all of his relationship with the Father...

In Jesus, God declares that nothing will stand between us & Him. In Jesus God proclaims that the most precious of all his creations is us. Jesus comes to redeem & heal our broken human existence by 1st connecting the eternal merciful forgiving love of God with us God's sinful human creatures, but 2nd Jesus comes **to unite us to & raise us to life** in the presence/power of God now & forever as God's beloved sons & daughters. So when God shouts his acclaim from heaven, "*You are my beloved! You bring me great joy!*" He's talking to you.

You are God's beloved. That is already true for you. Not because of what you do, but because of who Jesus is. That blessing – affirmation – validation – approval -endorsement was tattooed on you the moment you were baptized. Wherever you go whatever you do or is done to you, God continues to love you/accept you/hold you *The Lord directs the steps of the godly. He delights in every detail of their lives. Though they stumble, they will never fall, for the Lord holds them by the hand.* – Ps 37:23-24 Baptism is not your gift of faith back to God. Baptism, is God's act of Love on you... Paul would write: "*...when we were joined with Christ Jesus in baptism, we joined him in his death...For we died & were buried with Christ by baptism. And just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glorious power of the Father, now we also may live new lives. Since we have been united with him in his death, we will also be raised to life as he was.*"

You are through baptism united with Jesus. So when He steps into the Jordan, you are there. When the Holy Spirit pours down on him, you receive it too. When God the Father declares, "*you bring me great joy,*" He is talking about you. Your sins have been absorbed by Christ. Your sinful selves crucified & buried with Christ. You have been raised again by the glory of the Father, just as Christ was. You are truly called "child of God," "beloved," given a status like Christ because of him.

"When our deepest truth is that we are the Beloved & when our greatest joy & peace come from fully claiming that truth, it follows that this has to become visible & tangible in ways that we eat & drink, talk & love, play & work" — Henri Nouwen

God loves you...apart from anything else you do with your life...God's just crazy about you. Jesus Christ is love that is truly transformative...forever. Everything we gain in this world will rot, fall apart, & be left behind ...and all that's left...is that one relationship that binds you to eternity & to all those similarly connected to Jesus.

What if you are already bathed in blessing? Awash in approval? Saturated in validation? Drenched in affirmation? Soaked in endorsement?

Over & over again the NT affirms that in Christ you are...loved. 1 Jn 3:3...accepted. Eph 1:6...a child of God. Jn 1:12 ... Jesus' friend. Jn 15:14...a joint heir with Christ sharing His inheritance with Him. Rom 8:17...united with Christ & one spirit with Him. 1 Cor 6:17...a temple of the Holy Spirit 1 Cor 6:19...a member of Christ's body. 1 Cor 12:27...redeemed and forgiven. Col 1:14...complete in Jesus Christ Col 2:10.. free from condemnation. Rom 8:1...a new creation 2 Cor 5:17...chosen of God, holy & dearly loved. Col 3:12...do not have a spirit of fear, but of love, power, & self-control 2 Tim 1:7...God's co-worker. 2 Cor 6:1...seated in heavenly places with Christ. Eph 2:6...have direct access to God Eph 2:18...chosen to bear fruit Jn 15:16 one of God's living stones, being built up in Christ as a spiritual house. 1 Pet 2:5 can always know the presence of God because He never leaves me Hebrews. 13:5 can do all things through Christ who gives you strength Php 2:13...can ask God for wisdom and He will give what you need. Jas 1:5

God showed how much he loved us by sending his one and only Son into the world so that we might have eternal life through him. This is real love—not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as a sacrifice to take away our sins. – 1 Jn 4:9-10

Jesus is the One who is Love. He is the one who is the love of the Father made flesh for you – for me – for all.

Let's pray...**Lord Jesus, Wash our lives not just with water but by your Spirit and with your love and your promise to always be with us. Call us and claim us again as your beloved children and workers with you in your kingdom. In your Name we pray...Amen**