



**January 12, 2020 – The Baptism of our Lord**  
**Matthew 3:13-17**

I grew up in Alberta with -30s and -40s in the winter. In my first parish there I had a huge arctic parka that went down to my knees one included a large hood. It was perfect. I was never cold. One Sunday I had the children come forward like we do here and to talk about baptism and I kept my coat was handy.

I asked one of them how they stayed warm when it is so cold. A coat, of course. I grabbed my coat and invited one of them to try it on. His body entirely disappeared under it. He looked like a mysterious moving pile on the floor. Everyone laughed. “*Are you warm?*” “*Ya!*” he announced, as I flipped the giant hood back and his little head popped out. Baptism is like that. It keeps us warm as we grow into it. That little guy would be about 44 years old now and still growing into God’s promises.

For Jesus came for baptism too...

**Identity**

When he showed up, John hesitated because he called his baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. Those coming were seeking hope, love, God’s forgiveness -- *What is Jesus doing here?* he wondered. *This should be the other way around.* But Jesus said, “*It’s okay John, let’s do it this way. It’s the right thing to do.*”

Jesus identified with us that day – stepping into our sin and bringing it to the water – because there it is washed away, with a new creation as the result.

The Holy Spirit came like a dove. A dove was also the reminder of the new beginning after the flood in the Noah story. It came with an olive branch in its beak to show that creation started again<sup>1</sup>. God’s voice announces this at baptism with an identity: *My Beloved*. A new beginning. A name. Important stuff for life...

*One month in Corrections, I was asked to be the interim Director General for the Indigenous department. Five Regional Elders were going on a retreat in Chilliwack and invited me along since their usual director on own language training would normally attend. They brought their sacred bundles, sweetgrass, sage and tobacco. We talked of correctional issues, healing programs and circles, challenges and frustrations. We prayed for offenders. But as much as anything else, they told jokes and we laughed. One afternoon the discussion turned to our names. They told stories about their indigenous names and how they were defined by them. I sat and listened.... and then they asked me*

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<sup>1</sup> Genesis 8:11

*about mine. I said, “Well my mom was going to call me Robin, but my dad said that his son wasn’t going to be named after some stupid bird. Instead, I was called Terrance, a Roman name links to heart or ground.*

*They loved that! “You have your feet on the ground!” they said and laughed. The sacred pipe was passed and I wondered what just happened. Somehow the loose meaning of my name identified me in a new way.*

When we approach baptism – we gain an identity. Anytime we step forward as God’s person and provide loving, caring or serving acts – we again identify ourselves under the name we were given: *son, daughter, Beloved, Christian.*

### **Affirmation**

You know this little rhyme: **“Sticks and stones can break my bones, but names can never hurt me.”** I beg to differ. Negative name calling is verbal abuse and tears a person down. We will not speak them or accept them. Names are meant to define us in life. *Mother, brother, friend, soul-mate, care-giver, partner* – these are names that give and affirm.

At baptism we hear is that God is: *well-pleased, proud, glad, and loving toward us.* Baptism gives the life of God’s mercy and blessing into which we grow.

*In his book entitled Life of the Beloved: Spiritual Living in a Secular World, Henri Nouwen, talks about three ways to remember our Beloved-ness.*

1. ***Unmask the world and the lies it tells about you. Don’t accept the put downs.***  
We are not defined by our past.
2. ***Look for people and places where your beloved-ness is spoken: church, support groups, families, friends ... are reminders.*** We are stronger together.
3. ***Show gratitude to God and others for their care. Every time we are grateful it is easier to see other things to be grateful for.*** Gratitude can heal.

### **“Zero-threat” Mission**

Everything really began for Jesus with his baptism. He was named as God’s child and affirmed in God’s love. With a clear view on life, Jesus went for a walk and invited others to join him with welcome for others.

There are a lot of people who have time for someone who really cares and is not trying to take something away, manipulate, exclude, or blame. Watch the story of Jesus and you will see that whenever disciples tried to push others back, Jesus intervened. We are called to be **“zero-threat” welcoming people.** That is difficult and it is rare in this world.

When the disciples failed or were afraid to serve like that, they always found each other again. God doesn't give up on us. We don't give up on each other. We grow into this gift of baptism... just like a garment that is too big for a child.

That's how it works.

Thank you, baptized, beloved one; that like Jesus, you step forward and reach out selflessly to others.

Amen.