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January 9, 2011

***To Be Baptized***  
***Matthew 3:13-17***

One of my ***favorite*** things to do in church is a baptism. I love to say the whole given name of someone, especially a child, because I know it's a name chosen for them alone. And when I baptize them, I know that they are being confirmed as a Beloved child of God.

Names are ***powerful***.

Do you know what your name means?

Do you know what your parents' inspiration was for your name?

I was named Natalie because my father loved the actress Natalie Wood.

What about you?

Of course, the power of parents to name their children sometimes go ***awry***. We've all met those children with well, shall we say, interesting names! I find it refreshing to know that parents don't have the final word on our names and what they mean.....

In their fascinating book, *Freakonomics*, economists Steven Levitt and Stephen Dubner point out that one of the first acts of parental power comes in the naming of a child. Many believe the name carries great significance. Not always true. Take the case of the ***Lane brothers***.

Back in 1958, a baby boy was born into the Lane family. Robert—the father—chose to name the boy Winner.

The Lanes had another son several years later. For unknown reasons, Robert named this baby Loser! Contrary to all expectations, ***Loser Lane*** succeeded. He graduated from college and later became a sergeant with the New York Police Department. Nowadays, no one feels comfortable calling him Loser. His police colleagues refer to him as Lou.

And what of the brother with the "can't miss" name? The most noteworthy achievement of ***Winner Lane***, now in his mid 40s, is the sheer length of his criminal record—nearly three dozen arrests for burglary, domestic violence, trespassing, resisting arrest, and other mayhem.

*Steven Levitt and Stephen Dubner, Freakonomics (HarperCollins, 2005), pp.163-164*

Thankfully, **parents don't** have the final word on our names!

We know that Jesus had a special name,  
Emmanuel, which means God With Us.  
And he was named at his baptism.  
When the voice of God descended as the Spirit upon Jesus at his baptism,  
the voice said, 'this is **my Son, the Beloved**, with whom I am well pleased'.

Names are so powerful in our lives because they are used  
to **identify** us every day of our lives.  
We each have **different** names too—what are your different names?  
and nicknames? My family used to call me Bones because I was so skinny.  
Now they just call me Nat, or to the little ones, Aunt Nat.  
Who are you?

The thing about names is that some of them are **given** to us,  
and some are **taken** from us.  
Sometimes an Edward ends up being called Eddie much to his dismay.  
Some names that are given to us bring us great **pride**, like *smartie*  
Some names bring us **shame**, like *stupid, or jerk*,  
Some names bring us **joy**, and other names bring us **sorrow**.

What are the names that have brought you **happiness**?  
And what are the names that have brought you **pain**?

I want you to **re-imagine your baptism** for a moment,  
And if you haven't been baptized, imagine it with me.  
Remembering the names you've been given,  
even those names that have brought you pain,  
and imagine yourself receiving the water of baptism,  
And Hearing God's voice speak directly to you:

This is your name, you are my **Beloved Child**, with whom I am well pleased.

**Beloved Child of God**—that's your real name.  
It's your only name that matters in this life.  
Ever thought of it that way?  
Ever wondered what the world would be like if we treated one another  
As if this were our name?

Beloved Child of God—**your name, and His name**.

It's why this story of Jesus' baptism is so important.

And you know, his **baptism and naming** came BEFORE his temptation and his ministry in all the gospels. In the three synoptic gospels it comes before the temptation & ministry, in John it precedes the calling of the first disciples. In other words, Jesus' identity comes before his mission. He needed to know **who he was** before he knew **what to do**.

Do you think the same is true for us?  
Do we need to know **whose we are** before we know **what to do** in our lives?  
Maybe we live into our mission in this world when we realize our true **identity** is as a Beloved Child of God.

And all this happens at **baptism**, or as we remember our baptism. At baptism, we are blessed by God's Spirit, brought into the family of faith, and confirmed as a beloved child of God forever.

Today as we remember Jesus' baptism, and our own, Let's stop and ask ourselves—  
**do you know your name?** your true identity?  
Have you heard and believed God's voice, that says,  
You are my Beloved Child, with whom I am well pleased.

I think we discover who we are, by **hearing and believing whose** we are.

So many people want to **define us** in this world,  
We go to work, school, watch TV, go online—  
see a million offers to tell you who you are.

But what if we know and believe that our primary name is Christian?  
That our primary identity is **Beloved Child of God**.  
Take a moment and say that in your head—I am a Christian.  
I am a **Beloved Child of God**.

Sometimes we don't necessarily believe those **two things go** together.  
We believe we are Christians, we subscribe to these beliefs about Jesus Christ, but we may or may not believe that we are beloved children of God. For many of us secretly we believe in a God of wrath or anger or so much judgment that we cannot possibly be beloved children. But we are—that's the truth, and the good news,

Christians by nature are named.... ***beloved child of God.***

This is ***why Jesus was baptized.***

It wasn't because he had to be baptized—

he certainly didn't need to have his sins washed away.

He did it ***for us***, because he is one of us, and he was showing us just what baptism truly is for each of us.

It's that moment when Father, Son, and Spirit come together to confirm ***whose we are, and who we are***—Beloved children of God.

It's the ***identity*** we need before we set out on our own mission in life.

If we believe that we are Beloved children of God,

If we really believe that, wouldn't that help us to ***face the challenges*** and pressures of this world?

Do you think that such a realization could ***change a life?***

What if.....

You are more than a ***victim of a bully*** at work or school—  
you are a child of God.

You are more than a ***caretaker*** of parents and children—  
you are a beloved child of God.

You are more than a 60hr a week ***employee***, or an unemployed worker—  
you are a beloved child of God.

You are more than a ***grieving*** man or woman—  
you are a beloved child of God.

You are more than a ***single parent***—  
you are a beloved child of God.

You are more than someone with ***cancer or illness***—  
you are a beloved child of God.

It doesn't matter if your name is Dennis or Delores,  
whatever your legal name,

in baptism you are ***truly named*** by Father, Son, and Spirit,

you have been given the most beautiful, powerful, name of all:

***Beloved Child of God.***