



AND A VOICE CAME FROM HEAVEN:  
"YOU ARE MY SON, WHOM I LOVE;  
WITH YOU I AM WELL PLEASSED."

- MARK 1:11 -

## "Remind Me Who I Am"

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We can all say that we have an identity, and that we have been asked to present or prove it at various times in our lives. Usually that means handing over your ID for some kind of event, or it means that someone will look at your name and probably match it with your face. But there are other ways in which we have an identity as well. It can be more about what we do, or it can be about our personality. Some people have certain ways they are typically identified. "Oh, you're friends with so and so." Or maybe it's, "oh, you're the brains of the group." Identity can affect how we feel about ourselves, and some people would say that it can definitely become "impaired" to an extent if you believe you have a less than amazing reputation. Identity can be very confusing at times. I mean, put simply, identity is just defined as the qualities, beliefs, personality, or looks that make up a person. So then, if that's the case, why is it so confusing sometimes? Well, do you know who you are? There are a lot of people out there who wonder what their purpose is, who they really are, or who they truly matter to.

In our Gospel reading today, we briefly hear about the baptism of Jesus, and we can hear a very hopeful statement sent by God. He says to Jesus, "You are my son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased." Right away, we can hear the identity of Jesus being established. God tells Jesus who he is. He tells him where he fits, and that he matters to God. He calls him "my son" and says he loves him, and he is pleased with him. Wouldn't it be great to hear that directly from God in this way? We hear these things being preached all the time, but wouldn't it be nice to know and hear from God that he is pleased with us and he loves us and for him to call us his children? We want to know that when we mess up, God still loves us and cares about us. We want to know that we still matter in his eyes. Jesus had an identity directly related to God, and it was given to him in this way.

In the reading, we hear next about the Spirit sending Jesus out into the desert for forty days to be tempted by Satan. This is located in the very next line of the scripture. And we don't hear all the details of the baptism or the temptations because Mark keeps it VERY brief. In fact, Mark keeps his entire chapter very brief. As I was reading through this scripture, I couldn't help but wonder why it was so short and why there were no specific details of what was happening. But then again, maybe Mark was trying to tell us something without the need to use words. Maybe he wanted to highlight OUR biggest temptation of all as humans and as Christians: that is, the temptation to wonder if God truly cares or if he is truly present in times of hardships. Essentially, our temptation to have doubt in the Lord. I mean, all of us want to hear specific and precise answers to our questions, and when we can't hear his words answering us, we have doubts. Does he have the power to save? Does he truly care about me? As I've been doing research for my senior project, I learned that the number one most asked question by Christians is "Why does God allow bad things to happen?" Honestly, I didn't find this surprising. In fact, even I have found myself asking this question in several moments of my life, especially in the past year. I feel like this question has come up a lot with the ever-changing state of the world right now. "God, why? Why have you allowed this to happen? Do you care? Why is this happening? Just make it stop!"

For Jesus, his time of being tested showed if he would hold onto his identity that had been given to him by God. Would Jesus still believe that God loved him even through the hard times? Or would he turn away from God and try to get through everything all on his own? When conflicts came, when things got extremely tough, when no one seemed to be on his side, when he was suffering, when he may not have known if he got it wrong or if God was still pleased with him, would he hold onto his belief and trust in a wonderful God who loves him and cares about him? Would he hold onto God's identity given to him, "You are my son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased."

We can imagine what Satan must have been telling Jesus during this time. Words such as "You are not good enough. You do not matter. God does not care about you anymore. They hate you. You got it all wrong." Forty days in a desert with no one else speaking would probably seem like an endless nightmare. All he could do was try to hold onto his identity given to him not long before.

Personally, I spend way too much time worrying. And many times, it is about things that are completely out of my control anyway. I tend to wonder whether I said or did something right. I go over and over things in my head, and somehow still end up with the same conclusion that I originally started with. Or I struggle when I am asked to make tough decisions. Or I try to control things that are out of my control. "Why is everything going wrong? Why can't God just sort it out already? Why does God allow bad things to happen?" And to be honest, I can't completely answer that question that is asked by so many people. But what I can say is that I try to hold onto the belief that my identity is so much more than what it seems, holding onto the belief that our identity, just like Jesus, is centered around God. We hold onto the belief that God loves us and is even pleased with us – not because I get things right or because I can be perfect in all ways (After all, we are all sinners), but because we belong to him and he chose us. He chose us. We are his children, and he will not abandon us in hard times. He will not abandon us when we feel like we have lost ourselves. He chose us to be with him forever. So, when you're in the desert and it seems hopeless or you're wondering where's God in all this, what will you hold onto? Well guess what: You don't have to answer that because there are no hard decisions for us to make this time because we are already chosen by God in our baptism, and he has already given you your identity, and he has already given us the good news. Listen to what Jesus says after his 40 days in the desert. He says, "The time has come. The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!"

We are going through hard times right now, and I hate to say it, but this will not be the last time we go through hardships and unexpected conflicts in our lives.

Maybe the pandemic isn't the first hardship that comes to your mind right now. Maybe it's something else. Maybe you started a new school or a new job or moved to a new town and suddenly you're in the middle of a new experience that you've got to try and navigate yourself around in. Believe me, I have had my share of navigating new experiences in the past year that I would have never expected in a million years. Back in March, I got up in the morning and went off to school as normal, and suddenly, within about AN HOUR we were told that we would not be coming back next week due to some kind of new and strange virus spreading around the nation. To be honest, I didn't really think much of it – I just thought, "Oh, that's nice, I get a week off of school." And suddenly one week turned into two, which turned into a month, which turned into the rest of the school year. Suddenly I was forced to choose between going to school for my senior year or staying online in order to be safe several months after that day in March. But you know what? I've gotten pretty good at organizing and planning my days on my own. I've gotten pretty good at navigating my way through this online thing. Maybe God puts us in these new situations and forces us to adapt and figure out how to make it through because it forces us to trust him. Trust that he has a purpose, trust that things happen for a reason. So whether it's the new state of the world right now, or it's some other difficulty your facing in your life today you would have never expected like a family problem or financial trouble or health issues, trust that God has a plan. Our faith in the Lord keeps us going faith given to you by the holy spirit, faith that gives you

hope when everything seems hopeless, faith that comes by hearing God's word spoken to you, faith that silences Satan in the wilderness.

So again, I tell you to hear the good news, hear that there is good news coming, believe in God's will and his purpose for you. The storms will pass. So many things in life will try to knock us over or try to shape our identity and who we are. But if we have seen and know our needs of forgiveness and love, then our identity is found with Christ. We should live as if we belong to him. He is our shield and our source of hope and our encouragement. He is our shelter in the midst of all these storms.

The biggest temptation in our lives is to turn away from God and our faith in him. We are tempted to have doubts and to let go of our identity with him and our identity of being a member of the Church of Christ. When these temptations come, or when we feel like we are drowning in the storms, we won't listen to the voice saying to give up. We will listen to the voice saying, "You are my child whom I love; with you, I am well pleased." Amen.