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Mark 1:9-11

You are my child, whom I love; with you I am well pleased

At that time Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. ¹⁰As Jesus was coming up out of the water, he saw heaven being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. ¹¹And a voice came from heaven: "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased."

Have you ever had someone say a word or drop a note that deeply touched you? A few weeks ago, I received a card in the mail. It was from a man named Hank Silva. Hank is a good man. He is a hard worker who loves his family and friends. The card read, "Tough times don't last but tough guys do." Enclosed was a check for the building fund. I needed to hear those words. The strengthened me. His words were the right words spoken at the right time.

In our reading from Mark 1, we hear the right words spoken at the right time. The occasion was the baptism of Jesus. At his baptism, little clues tell us about Jesus.

We read that Jesus is from Nazareth. Nazareth was a small town in the North. When people heard Jesus was from Nazareth, the common response was, "Can anything good come from Nazareth" (John 1:46). Nazareth was a place for the lowly. Jesus came for the lowly.

Next, we read that Jesus was baptized in the Jordan River. If you remember, when Israel entered the Promise Land, they passed through the Jordan River. Jesus came to lead us into the Promise Land with the Father.

When Jesus rose out of the water, it says, "The heavens were torn open." The next time Mark uses that word (torn open) is at the crucifixion of Jesus when the temple curtain was torn from top to bottom. Jesus came to tear open heaven so that we could enter.

Next, the Spirit descended upon Jesus in the form of a dove. In the beginning, the same Spirit hovered over the waters of creation. During the flood, it was a dove that signaled to Noah that the waters dried up. A dove was the only bird acceptable for temple sacrifice. Jesus came to create us anew, to tell us the judgment was over, and to be the acceptable sacrifice.

All of these things clues combine to tell us that Jesus came to save us.

As important as these clues are, what comes next is the most significant. After the heavens were torn open and the Spirit descended, God says, "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased." Talk about the right words spoken at the right time. These are beautiful words. These are the words of a father to a son. This is the language of love.

All of us can understand the significance of these words. For some of you, you had parents who shared their emotions with you. They told you how much they loved you. For others, you did not hear these words. There is deep pain inside of you because you long to hear these words.

There is a story of a father and son who had become estranged. The son ran away, and the father set off to find him. He searched for months to no avail. Finally, in a last desperate effort to find him, the father put an ad in a Madrid newspaper. The ad read: "Dear Paco, meet me in front of the newspaper office at noon on Saturday. All is forgiven. I love you. Your Father." On that Saturday, 800 Pacos showed up looking for forgiveness and love from their fathers. (Bits & Pieces, October 15, 1992, p. 13).

We need to hear these words of love from our parents.

As I was working on this sermon, Abigail came to me longing for my attention. She was dressed in one of her Disney Princess costumes. When she got close to me, she pretended to faint. I realized that Abby was pretending to be Sleeping Beauty. I went over to her and gave her a kiss and she woke up.

A few minutes passed and I looked down to see one of Abby's slippers at my feet. Now Abby was Cinderella. She was sitting in the middle of the living room waiting for me to put the slipper on her foot. Once I did, Abby told me we had to dance and so we did.

The point in telling this is that Abby needs to hear these words. All of us need to hear these words. "You are my child, whom I love; with you I am well pleased."

These words have a way of defining us. These words defined Jesus. Jesus is not merely Mary and Joseph's boy. Jesus is not merely a good teacher. Jesus is not merely a miracle worker. Jesus is God's Son. The reason Jesus could teach and heal and cast out demons was because he is God's son. "You are my son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased."

You can imagine the pressure that comes with being God's son. How can he live up to this pressure? There is a young man whose dad was a star athlete and growing up everyone told him about his father. This young man felt the weight of being this man's son. At first, it pushed him to succeed. Over time, the son realized he would not be as accomplished as his father. This led to despair. In High School, the young man began drinking. One day, he was left at the doorstep of his house at 2:00 in the afternoon because he was already passed out drunk. When he woke up, he called for his dad. His dad came in. With tears running down his face, the son said he did not want to play sports anymore. To his surprise, the father said, "You don't have to. You never did. All I care about is you. I love you."

As you can imagine, those words put the son back together. His father had set him free. It did not matter what he did or did not do. His father loved him. That was enough.

It is no accident that twice God spoke these words to Jesus. The first time was at his baptism when Jesus was beginning his ministry. Jesus would spend forty days in the wilderness being tempted. The next time God spoke these words was Jesus' transfiguration. Right before Jesus would go to the cross. These words set him free for the task ahead. "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased."

What do these words mean for us? Why are they important for us 2000 years later? Don't you understand? Jesus came to save the little guy, to lead us into the Promise Land, to tear heaven open so

that we may enter, to be the sacrifice we need. Because of Jesus, the words spoken to him are also spoken to you. At your baptism, God comes out and says, "You are my child, who I love; with you I am well pleased." God is holding nothing back. God is laying it all on the line.

Like many things, this can be overwhelming. The responsibility seems too great. The devil makes us feel that we are not very good children. The devil convinces us that because of our sin, God does not love us.

The devil is wrong. Merit has nothing to do with love. God loves you in spite of you. When you run away, God searches for you as a shepherd searches for his lost sheep. God sends out his word saying, "All is forgiven. I love you. Meet me in front of the newspaper office." Once he finds us, God says, "Kill the fatted calf, invite the neighbors, pullout the good wine, we are having a party. For my child is home."

This is why we do evangelism. There are 800 Paco's out there longing to hear that their father has forgiven them. There is a world filled will sinners longing to hear that their Heavenly Father loves them and has forgiven them.

Listen again to God's words to you, "You are my child, whom I love; with you I am well pleased." Talk about the right words at the right time!

**In Jesus' Name
Amen**