

The Rev. Michael C. Fedewa
Feast of the Baptism of the Lord
January 11, 2015
Genesis 1:1-5
Acts 19: 1-7
Mark 1:4-11

Once again this week, our eyes have been drawn to scenes of violence and terrorism. The events that took place in France and around the world this week remind us that we live in a violent and dangerous world. Not only in France, but also in Yemen, where dozens were killed, and in Nigeria, where perhaps two thousand were killed, we witness again evidence that the world can be brutal and dangerous. Maybe it's because it was Paris, a city where many of us have been. Maybe it's because the brutality of the attack was filmed for all to see, maybe because this was an attack on a symbol of freedom of the press. For some reason this attack seemed to capture our attention more than many others. What also caught our attention was the response of the French people. Rallies throughout France, voices throughout the world have taken up the defiant cry of solidarity: I am Charlie. Whether or not we agree with the offensive nature of the magazine, we do stand with the victims of this massacre, and decry the violence that struck at the heart of a freedom that we all hold dear. I am Charlie. I am Charlie. I am Charlie.

In the Gospel today, Jesus comes from Nazareth to the Jordan and is baptized by John. People from the whole countryside, and all the people of Jerusalem were coming to be immersed in John's baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sin. Many wonder, why did Jesus the sinless one, participate in this baptism of forgiveness? I would suggest friends, that this Jesus shares this baptism as an act of solidarity with the people of Israel, and indeed with all humanity. As he steps into the dirty waters of the Jordan, Jesus is making the statement. I am Israel. I am part of her. I share her history of holiness, and faithfulness. I share her history of slavery and liberation. I share her history of exile, and restoration. I am one with all the people of Israel's past present and future. Indeed, as Israel is called to be the servant of all, as Jesus steps into the dirty waters of the Jordan, he is proclaiming: I am humankind. I am one with all the hopes and dreams of God's people throughout the world and throughout all time.

When Jesus steps out of the Jordan, the heavens are torn open, the Spirit comes upon him. This is the same Spirit, the same wind that swept over the waters of the world at creation. The Spirit, the wind, the voice proclaims that Jesus is God's beloved.

In his baptism, the identity of Jesus is revealed. He is Israel. He is humanity. He is God's beloved. Through Jesus, God is doing something new. Through Jesus, God will bring about a new creation.

The baptism of Jesus is the beginning of his public ministry. In his ministry Jesus will live out his identity in solidarity with all creation, and with all the people of the world. He will take his place with the poor, the lowly and the outcast. He will dine with the sinners and the impure. He will be one with the foreigners, the prisoners and the refugees. He will die with criminals and thieves. Jesus will share fully in all that it is to be human.

Jesus does not need to wear a sign. All of his life will reveal his identity: I am Israel. I am humankind. I am God's beloved.

In our baptism, the same Spirit that came upon Jesus is poured upon us. When we are baptized, we are born into the church, the body of Christ. When we are sealed with the oil we are given a share in identity of Jesus. To be anointed, is to be Christ. Christ, is not a name, it is an identity. Jesus is the Christ, the

anointed one. So, through the Spirit given at our baptism, we are able to proclaim: I am the Christ. I am the anointed of God.

The identity we were given at our Baptism gives us share in the ministry of Jesus and shapes our life in the world. Sharing the identity and ministry of Jesus, we are called to embrace our humanity, and take our place with the poor, the lowly and the outcast. We are called to be one with foreigners, prisoners and refugees. We are called to dine with sinners and the impure. We are called to die with criminals and thieves. We do not do this as individuals.. We cannot be everywhere and be all these things, to all these people. That is why we are baptized in to the body of Christ, the community of the Church We are the Church so that together we can be the body of Christ and embrace the whole world. We are the anointed body of Christ, so that we can carry out the ministry of Jesus in all time and in all places. We are the anointed body of Christ so that we can share his work and help to bring about the new creation.

As Jesus began his ministry, the voice from heaven declared that him to be the beloved of God. This identity as God's beloved gave Jesus the strength to face opposition, abandonment, disappointment, betrayal, suffering and death. Being God's beloved gave Jesus the strength and courage to embrace his humanity and live his ministry completely. Dear friends, this is an essential aspect of our identity as well. We are the beloved sons and daughters of God. You are a beloved daughter or son of God. As church, as we welcome, as we baptize, as we live our life in ministry, we are a people who know that we are beloved.

When we baptize Alison this morning, we promise to do all that we can to support her in her life in Christ, the most important thing we can do is to constantly reminder her of this fact. Alison, you are the beloved of God.

As those who know that we are beloved, we are called to proclaim this message to the world. To a world that witnesses so much violence and terrorism we proclaim, "You are God's beloved". To a frightened world that is tempted to despair we proclaim, "You are God's beloved."

But, before we can proclaim it to the world, we have to believe it about ourselves.

As I finish my sermon I want to ask all of you to join me to make three statements about your identity.

I want you to repeat these sentences. Using your name say. I am_____. I am God's anointed. I am God's beloved.

I am (your name)I am God's anointed. I am God's beloved.

I am(your name)I am God's anointed. I am God's beloved.

I am (your name) I am God's anointed, I am God's beloved.