

Scripture: Mark 1:4-11

Sermon Title: "Worthy"

Rev. Josh Fitterling

In the back of the sanctuary of a church in Pennsylvania, hung a flag. On this flag, was a prayer. Now, the prayer was not in English but in Pennsylvania Dutch, a German dialect of the area. I never learned Pennsylvania Dutch and so I had no idea what it said. And so I asked one of the members of that church to translate it for me. He looked at the flag and said, "Dear God, please leave us good Pennsylvania Germans just as we are." Now, not knowing the language, I can't be sure that the gentleman translating it wasn't just kidding around with me, but ever since I have found that "prayer" to be humorous as did the congregation, I found it fascinating, and, if this prayer was ever taken seriously, it would certainly be less than humble. To say we don't need to change, to boast of your own goodness to God in a prayer - yes, I think that qualifies as less than humble indeed.

To be humble, to have a modest view of oneself and one's own importance, is something that most of us are taught from when we are just little. To learn early on that the world does not revolve around us. That all of humanity is created in the image of God, and so what would make us ever think that we are the most important for we are all part of the one human family. Such humility is in fact a key virtue of the ministry that Jesus proclaims. "All who exalt themselves will be humbled, and all who humble themselves will be exalted." - Matthew 23:12

Humility is the perfect middle ground, or balancing point, for how we view ourselves, our level of importance in the world. On either side of humility are two extremes. Now on the one side of humility, the one extreme, is an over-inflated view of oneself - exalting yourself as the best, tooting our own horns, if you will. The idea that you are the only important person in the world. I had a classmate in college who was certainly a very smart kid, but had one of these over-inflated views of himself. So much so that,

even when he asked for help, he made it feel like those of us who were helping should be grateful for the opportunity to help him. He never said “thank you” – why should he right? In his mind, we should be thanking him for the opportunity. And I would guess that we all have experiences with people who tip the scales of humility in this direction.

Now, on the other side of humility, is a degraded view of oneself – feeling that you are the lowest and least – having little to no sense of self-worth. Here I think of the religious zealots from around the 11th, 12th, 13th century who flogged themselves with whips because they felt that they were so worthless, so horrible, and so sinful that they needed to beat it out of themselves in order to gain forgiveness and to be exalted by God.

At the heart of this scale of humility is the idea of our sense of worth. Believing we are worth more than gold on one side, worth less than dirt on the other, and finding the equilibrium where we understand our worth in the eyes of God. Our scripture reading for today as we hear of the baptism of Christ, holds a wonderful example of this scale of humility. As we consider John the Baptist, it may at first be hard to place him on the scale. On one hand he was proclaiming a baptism of repentance, drawing a following of people all around the Judean Countryside, all over Israel, and he was bold in the message he was sharing – is this an over-inflated ego? And on the other hand, he clearly wasn’t living extravagantly, clothed in camel’s hair, eating honey and locust, says he is not worthy to even be a servant to the one who comes after me – is this a degrading view of himself?

But in the end, Jesus places him right in the middle for John accepts his worth given by Christ. For Jesus looked at John, a man who has been following his call in the world to prepare the way for Jesus and said, “You claim to be not worthy. In your humility, you will play a key role in ushering in the beginning of my official ministry on earth.” John saw himself as unfit to untie the sandals of Jesus and yet Jesus saw John as worthy of baptizing him and participating in the start of his ministry that has forever changed, will forever change, the world. And John doesn’t take it for granted, doesn’t let this honor go to his head and he doesn’t keep pushing back and saying, “I couldn’t

possibly". But he serves faithfully and follows where Jesus has called him. That's humility.

Beloved People of God, there are a lot of things out there in our world that try and define our worth. That inflate our egos or other things that tread upon us to keep our sense of self-worth low. But, our balance is found in the worth that Christ defines in our lives. A worth that calls us into discipleship as we continue the ministry of Jesus started at his baptism, touching lives still today. For Jesus looks at us and says, you are worthy of being my people - of being my disciples - so let me guide you and let me lead. Don't exalt yourself, but live a life that exalts Jesus. Serve faithfully, serve humbly, and never question your worth as a redeemed Child of God. Find your balance of humility as you embrace this simple yet powerful truth - that you are worthy in the eyes of God. You know, when I think back to that prayer flag saying "Dear God, leave us good Pennsylvania Germans just as we are" and I think we need a re-write. One that shows our humility and our worth as we follow and serve Jesus. Perhaps our prayer should be "Dear God, take us just as we are, and lead us to where you want us to go, never leaving us alone." Amen.