

The Rev. Dennis J. Reid  
 A Sermon for the Baptism of our Lord | Year B | Mark 1:4-11  
 January 7th 2018  
 St. Alban's Church, Sinking Spring, PA

In the Name of God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Let's try a little experiment.

I'd like us each to think briefly about our lives as if they were a resume. For as short as resumes often are, we use them try to represent ourselves as best we can so that others know the things that make up who we are. Maybe you already have one for your profession with things like your accomplishments, your skill set, where you went to school, and where you've been previously employed. But think about what your resume would look like if it summed up your entire life. If you had to tell of your entire life in a page or two, what information would you include to represent all of who and what you are? Given the scope of your life, what would make the cut? And what wouldn't?

Sure, you might include your career and some achievements, but for your entire life, this summary might look a little different than most resumes. Maybe it would include your family, with "1996 Mom of the year" being placed in bold near the top of the page. Perhaps you'd include things you'd never dream of including on a corporate resume -- maybe this is the place for your "2004 Berks County hot dog eating contest champion" ribbon to make an appearance. Or maybe you'd include the story about your game winning home run in little league or the piano recital where you played every note perfectly. We often go to the memories of accolades or success when trying to define who we are.

But for we who are Christians, perhaps the more appropriate question to be asking for this exercise isn't "who are we?" but rather "*whose* are we?"

I once attended a church conference where a bishop was talking about this same topic. He posed the same question to the room -- what would make the cut for your life resume? We all replied with our accomplishments, or what schools we went to, or where we had been employed. After surveying the entire room and not finding the answer he was looking for, he asked another question: "did anyone think to list their baptism?"

You could have heard a pin drop. We were all a little embarrassed not to have thought about listing our baptism when it came to our life resumes. We knew the bishop was right, of course, because while our successes and accomplishments in life can be joyful things, the source of our joy, our worth, and our very life itself isn't in the things we've done but rather in the one in whom we live and move and have our being -- the source of all that we are is our God.

Jesus could claim many "accolades", as it were -- he could claim that no one ever had a baptism as great as his, with the heavens tearing open and the Holy Spirit descending upon him like a dove. He could boast that all of creation was made through him, for Jesus is the eternally-begotten Son of God. And of course, in his resurrection, he could claim that no one was ever as powerful as he is, for no one has triumphed over death like he did. But boasting was never his goal. In his own words, Jesus came to serve, not to be served. In all that Christ did, he was always looking outside of himself, knowing that his greatest identity was not something to be exploited in power, but something to offer in servitude. He came to be a servant of all, in full knowledge that he was the beloved of his Father. Nothing was too low for him, and no one was unworthy of his compassion.

Our baptism is much like his. We, too, are baptized in water, given the Holy Spirit, and reminded of God's unending love for us. It is also the beginning of our ministry, for the Holy Spirit is the giver of spiritual gifts, gifts that we are

given that might go out into the world and use them for glory of God and betterment of our world. Though if we wanted to know how our baptisms are like Christ's, we might learn it from his baptizer, John. John, too, had many accolades. He stood up to kings, he had many disciples of his own, and he even baptized Jesus in the Jordan River. But again and again, he points away from himself and towards Jesus: "The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the thong of his sandals. I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit." It isn't that he didn't care about himself, but rather, he knew he was in the presence of the Lamb of God himself -- "Jesus must increase, and I must decrease," he would say in John's Gospel.

When we are baptized, we might as well be adding that line to our resumes -- Jesus must increase, and I must decrease. For our baptism, like Jesus' baptism, gives us the power of the Holy Spirit not for our own sake but for the sake of others and for the glory of God. And usually, our resumes point out things about ourselves -- things we've done, accomplishments we can be proud of -- but the baptized are reminded regularly that, for we who are marked as Christ's own forever and sealed by the Holy Spirit, our boast is not of ourselves but of God's grace. St. Paul said it well: "May I never boast of anything except the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ."

Allow me to ask some final questions -- because you have been baptized, what now would you like to see on your life's resume? Teacher, one who helps others understand the Word? Apostle, one who is sent out to do the work of God? Evangelist, one who tells everyone the good news? Exhorter, one who encourages? Administrator, one who keeps the saints organized? Giver, one who is generous? All of these and many more just might be on your baptismal resume.

Now, really, think about what you're really good at -- where you find the most joy, the most energy, the things or roles that you do where you feel most alive and most fulfilled -- perhaps that's where the Holy Spirit has given you gifts through your baptism. Maybe you've used those gifts throughout your whole career. Maybe you're just figuring out what some of those gifts might be. Either way, the life of the baptized is a life of being good stewards of all that God has given us, especially our talents and our abilities.

Just as Christ began to heal and teach and do so many things according to his ministry after his baptism, so do all the baptized. On this day when we celebrate the baptism of our Lord, let's celebrate your baptism and ministries, too. I encourage you to pray to the Holy Spirit for guidance on how to best use your gifts here at St. Alban's and in the world. Who knows what the next line on your resume will be because of it!