

**Feb 26, 2012**

**Mark 1:9-15**

*Restoring Relationships Through Faithfulness*

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A young pastor was visiting with an older church member who had an old hound dog. The pastor said, "That sure is a nice dog, what's his name?" The older church member hemmed and hawed and then said, "What's that flower called with a long stem and thorns and red pedals?" The pastor replied, "A rose." The older member said, "Oh yeah! That's right." Then looking over to his wife, the member said, "Rose, what do we call that old dog?"

Do you remember every day that you are a child of God?  
 Do you remember every day the promises that God made to you in baptism?  
 Do you remember every day that God is faithful even when (and especially when) we are forgetful?

God is faithful and his mercies endure forever!

Hallmark suggests a different message when it comes to faithfulness. One anniversary card read, "*I can't promise you forever, but I can promise you today.*" Sadly, that's about as deep a commitment as some people are willing to make.

Here is the really good news. God has made a commitment to us forever – a promise poured out in the waters of baptism. And nothing can separate us from the love of God. That makes all the difference for life. Baptism gives us a clear identity and a compelling purpose for living the faith every day in a special relationship with God and each other.

Today we begin a Lenten worship series called Restoring Relationships. Our theme today is Restoring Relationships Through Faithfulness. Our reading is from Mark's Gospel chapter 1 verse 9-15. Mark writes:

**(Read text)**

Mark doesn't tell us much about Jesus' baptism. In fact, Mark doesn't give us many details at all. We are not told what Jesus thought or why he was baptized. Earlier in this chapter we are told that John was baptizing people for the forgiveness of their sins. But, Jesus was sinless. He didn't need to be baptized. So why was he?

Mark tells us that right after Jesus' baptism the heavens are torn open and a voice from heaven (God) confirms who Jesus was (God's Son) and what he was to do (please God). It's no coincidence then that temptation follows immediately after Jesus' baptism. Jesus is given a promise from God, "*You are my Son, the beloved; with you I am well pleased.*" And then the devil goes to work trying to woo Jesus away from God.

Mark doesn't share any details about those temptations. Matthew and Luke do and in all three Gospel accounts Jesus stays true to his baptism. He resists the devil's temptations. And that means Jesus can guide us to do the same as we go out into the world to do ministry in his name. The devil is constantly trying to woo us away from God too.

The devil loves it when we are in a conflict with someone.  
 The devil loves it when we hold a grudge against someone.  
 The devil loves it when we refuse to forgive others as we have been forgiven.  
 The devil loves it when we are unfaithful to God and each other.  
 The devil loves it when we fail to share our blessings with others.

I believe the devil is most active in the lives of church people because he tends to already have those who don't come to church. So we, of all people, need to be on our guard and stay spiritually fit to resist the temptations of the devil in the church and outside the church.

I love how Martin Luther creatively and humorously puts it:

*Wherever God erects a House of Prayer,  
 The devil always builds a chapel there:  
 And upon closer examination,  
 The latter has the largest congregation.*

Jesus relied on God's word, God's promise, as he battled the devil's temptations. Jesus lived into his baptism, guided by God's word. Of course, our baptism is not as dramatic as Jesus' baptism but our baptism is just as defining. It reveals who we are (children of God) and what we are to do (please God).

In baptism God says to each one of us "you are my beloved." In that moment, as the water is poured over our head, God's says "with you I am well pleased." We spend the rest of our lives living into our baptism as children of God.

Living into our baptism and we need not avoid one another instead we can love one another. Living into our baptism and we need not tear down one another instead we can build up one another. Living into our baptism and we need not hold grudges instead we can forgive one another, and ask others to forgiveness us.

How are you doing living into your baptismal identity and purpose?

Who do you need to love?

Are you resisting the devil's temptations?

Who are you holding a grudge against?

Who do you need to forgive?

Who do you need to ask to forgive you?

Relationships are hard. They get messy. They are difficult. They are stressful. But God's word comes to us in baptism saying, "*You are my child, you are loved; with you I am well pleased. Now go live it.*" And we can, in spite of our sinfulness. We have been washed clean and set free.

Remember every day that you are a child of God?  
 Remember every day the promises that God made to you in baptism?  
 Remember every day that God is faithful even when (and especially when) we are forgetful?

Join me now as we reaffirm our faith through the waters of baptism (*walk to the baptismal font to finish the message...*)

God, who is rich in mercy, loves us and has given us a new birth with a living hope through the sacrament of Holy Baptism. The power of sin has been put to death in this water, and we are raised with Jesus to a new life every day. We gather as the body of Christ, his church, around this font weekly, reminded of our baptismal calling as children of God, and sent out for mission in a hurting and hostile world.

Do you promise to continue to live in the covenant of your baptism trusting in God's mercy and love for your life? If so answer - **I do!**

Do you renounce the devil and all the forces that defy God? If so answer - **I do.**

Do you renounce the powers of this world that rebel against God? If so answer - **I do.**

Do you renounce the ways of sin that draw you away from God? If so answer - **I do.**

Do you trust in Jesus as your Lord and Savior? If so answer - **I do.**

Brothers and sisters in Christ, God is faithful and his mercies endure forever and that makes all the difference for our lives. May we live in a special relationship with God and each other as children of God this day and our whole life through. Amen.