

"VOICES OF LENT (#1): THE VOICE OF BELONGING"

Mark 1:9-11

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[PROP NEEDED: Toy Story 2 Video Clip]

[Cornerstone U.M.C.; 2-25-24]

--I--

1. Read Text: Mark 1:9-11 (portrayed as dramatic character monologue by "John the Baptist.").
2. The Christian season known as "Lent" (that began last Sunday) is a time for spiritual self-examination and development, designed to help equip us to turn away from the finite things of the *world*, and instead to better focus on the *eternal* things of God.

A--So, today we're beginning a new worship series called "Voices of Lent," in which we'll be using spiritual themes of the season to explore ways in which God *speaks* in order to sustain and empower us in and for life.

B--To start, I want us to watch a short clip from the Disney movie Toy Story 2...

[SHOW VIDEO CLIP FROM "Toy Story 2" 00:20:39 - 00:23:05 (*Woody trying to escape to Stinky Pete saying "You don't know who you are, do you?" & and Woody finally seeing his heritage and responding "Wow!"*) Total Time 2:32]

3. You know, just like Woody, many of us are so busy trying to navigate life that we've never really learned WHO or WHOSE we are. ¹

A--I wonder if that was perhaps the case for Jesus in today's scripture from Mark 1, shared so creatively in the character monologue of John the Baptist by... [Name]

1--Sure, Jesus had grown up knowing he was special in some way -- no doubt his parents Mary and Joseph had shared with him the remarkable stories of his birth -- how they were visited by Shepherds and Magi, and were later told by Simeon that their child was the promised Messiah.

2--But *before* today's story, I wonder if there were still some lingering doubts about his identity, even in *Jesus'* mind ² -- perhaps like Stinky Pete said to Woody, God wanted to say to Jesus, "*Jesus, you don't who you are, do you?*"

B--So, in Verse 11, as the Holy Spirit descends as Jesus is coming up out of the water after being baptized by John, it says, "*There was a voice from heaven: 'You are my Son, whom I dearly love; in you I find happiness'*" (NRSV, "*in whom I am well pleased*").

1--Notice: we have here a divine voice reminding Jesus of his *identity* -- of the fact that he belonged to someone and something *greater* than himself.

2--In other words, at his baptism he experienced a “Voice of Belonging” that reminded him both of WHO he was and WHOSE he was.

4. You know, in today's world and context, it's easy to get caught up in and depressed about all the bad news that we see and hear, and we sometimes forget that we as God's people are part of someone/something *greater* than ourselves --

A--...That perhaps one of the things God wants each of us to do this season of Lent is once again to hear and claim His "Voice of Belonging" for our OWN lives --...

B--...To discover and be at peace knowing that life is not just about getting up in the morning, going to work or school, making money, spending it, and going to bed... only to wake up the next morning and do it all over again!

C--No! Like Jesus and Woody, you and I were created for something *more*: to find and claim our true identity as part of a *family* (the family of *God*) -- to discover both WHO we are and WHOSE we are in the Lord.

D--And when we do that, we'll find that that this identity will give us three things: ***purpose, passion, and power*** in life.

--II--

5. First, knowing that we belong to God can give you and I **PURPOSE** in life.

A--Notice: the voice from heaven *didn't* say, "*This is my Son, who I sent to earth to teach and preach about me, & to love people and heal the sick.*" Now, that IS what Jesus *did*, but it's not what God *said* about him here. No, God simply said, "*This is my Son... in whom I find happiness / am well pleased.*"³

B--In other words, Jesus' “purpose” on earth was not to DO any specific thing, other than to simply BE God's son for the world⁴ --his “purpose” was not one of DOING, but of BEING! (= the things he *did* came out of who he *was*)

1--I remember a number of years ago in the midst of a very challenging pastoral situation hearing God tell me, "*Brian, I don't love you because of your success at your church, or because you can 'fix it.'* I love simply because *you're mine!*"

2--I love the lyrics of a contemporary Christian song by the band “Casting Crowns” that say to God... “*How refreshing to know you don't need me; How amazing to find that you want me.*”⁵

3--You see, perhaps more than anything else, God's purpose and plan for your life and mine is not for us to DO any *specific* thing, but simply to BELONG to Him -- to claim our place as his sons and daughters; as His children.⁶

6. But if we know we belong to God, then it also gives us **PASSION** in life.

A--Think about it: it wasn't until this experience of baptism & the hearing of God's voice that Jesus became *passionate* about his public ministry of preaching, teaching, and healing -- it all started *after* this!

B--And I can think of similar encounters with God in my own life -- times when, after hearing God's *voice*, I became passionate about something *new*: a call to lead my church's youth group; or to be a song-leader in our college Wesley Fellowship; or to take mission trips to places like the Bahamas, New Orleans, El Salvador, rural Kentucky; or even to answer God's call into full-time Christian ministry.

C--You see, when God *calls* us, in addition to the joy of simply *being* part of His family, we're also given a *passion* to *share* that life with others through what we do.

7. Yet, claiming our place of belonging with God also gives us **POWER** in life.

A--Now, we didn't read Verses 12-13 immediately following today's text, but it says there that after his baptism, Jesus went into the wilderness where he was tempted for 40 days, and was ministered to by angels.

B--In other words, after experiencing the "Voice of Belonging," Jesus was given *power* to face and be victorious over the challenges and trials he was facing. And we know this story happened because Jesus told it to *his* faith family (the disciples).

C--In the same way, over the last few years, as Trish and I faced the challenges and grief over the loss (first) of her father Jim in 2020, and (then) of her mother Shirley last summer, she and I both were sustained by the great outpouring of love and support from *our* Christian family (our former Church, and you all here at Cornerstone).

D--In other words, like Jesus, our experience of "belonging" in the body Christ gave us *power* to face the tough things of life, just as it did with Jesus, & just as it can for you!

--III--

8. The bottom line is that when you and I take time to step back from the craziness of life and finally listen to and claim God's "Voice of Belonging" for ourselves, then we -- like Jesus in today's scripture -- will find *purpose, passion, & power* in & for our lives today.

A--So let me end by asking: Do you know who YOU are in Christ? Have you claimed YOUR place as one of God's children through a relationship with Jesus? And if so, are you *living* into that identity right now?

B--Today, God is inviting each of us to hear and respond to His "***Voice of Belonging.***"

9. [PRAY (include invitation to receive Jesus Christ as Lord)]

10. [SUGGESTED CLOSING SONG: UMH#419, "I Am Thine O Lord"]

ENDNOTES:

¹ It's true that in school and college we try out different subjects and majors; perhaps we try out different jobs or careers; we check out different churches; and we may even hang out with different crowds of people, all in an attempt to find what "fits" us best — to help us discover the "real" us. But all too often they are futile endeavors.

If you've seen this movie (Toy Story 2), you'll remember that when Woody discovered his true identity as the key character of "Woody's Roundup Gang," it freed him to become the toy he was created to be. I think the same is true with us: when we find and claim our identity, it frees us to become different people — to become the wife, husband, child, employee/employer, friend, church member, that God created us to be.

² After all, up to this point we have biblical record of any first-hand miracle or experience by Jesus to confirm any of the things he'd been told.

³ I love the way the The Message translation renders this verse: "*You are my Son, chosen and marked by my love, pride of my life.*"

⁴ In other words, to BE "*God-on-earth*," also called "Emmanuel / *God With Us*." He was to say the things God would say, and do the things God would do, which would obviously *include* things like teaching about love, healing the sick, etc., but the purpose was not primarily defined by what Jesus was to DO, but by WHO Jesus was: the "Son of God."

⁵ "Casting Crowns" lyrics from their song "*In Me*," in the album Lifesong (2005).

⁶ 1700 years ago, the great Christian leader Augustine once prayed, "[*O God,*] *you have made us for yourself, & our hearts are restless until they rest in you*" [Saint Augustine of Hippo (354-430), cited in Edythe Draper, Draper's Book of Quotations for the Christian World (Wheaton: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 1992). Entry #4312]. Author James Dobson once said "*A vital fringe benefit of being a Christian is the tremendous sense of [purpose] that grows out of knowing Jesus Christ.*" [James C. Dobson, cited in Edythe Draper, Draper's Book of Quotations for the Christian World (Wheaton: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 1992), Entry# 1266].