

The Important Task before You in this Year Is for You to Remember Your Identity as a Beloved Child of God

"This morning as we embark upon a new year it is natural for us to wonder what will be in store for us as the new year unfolds," the Rev. Dr. Brook Thelander said in his sermon Sunday. "What will 2009 be like? Will we see developments toward peace, or will we see heightening of tensions and more war around the world? Will the economy grow and the market rise, or will we see tougher economic times?"

"It is no coincidence," he continued, "that our Gospel lesson from Mark comes to us on this day as we enter into a new year, for Mark makes clear that all our human aspirations and desires are pinned on one thing—and that thing is a person. . . .

"Now it is very important for us to see that we don't learn who Jesus is from what he does or does not do in this story. Instead, we learn who Jesus is by a pronouncement made by God. . . . 'You are my beloved Son, and I am fully pleased with you.'

"Please do not miss this. Before Jesus does anything, before he cures the blind or raises the dead, before he teaches in the temple, before he turns water into wine, before he dies on the Cross, there is a revelation," and "Jesus' identity is established first, and the whole rest of Mark's Gospel is a working out of that identity."

"Do you remember what happens next?" Pastor Thelander asked. "Jesus is driven into the wilderness, where he is tested and tempted by Satan," whose attacks "all begin in the same fashion: 'If you are the Son of God, turn these stones to bread.' 'If you are the Son of God, throw yourself from the temple, and God's angels will protect you.' . . . Satan tries first and foremost here to rob Jesus of his identity, to make him doubt who he is. If he can do that, then he can ruin Jesus before he even begins, and prevent him from accomplishing his mission.

"In these harsh moments of testing, I'd like to think that the Father whispered into Jesus' ear, 'Remember who you are. You are my beloved Son, and I am fully pleased with you.'"

"The key question you will face this year is this: Who will you be? . . . The important task before you in this year is for you to remember your identity as a beloved child of God.

"You are God's beloved. How do I know this? Because it was proclaimed and made clear to you in your own baptism. In your baptism God named you and claimed you (p. 2→)



"The Infant Samuel", by Sir Joshua Reynolds (1723-1792), Musée Fabre, Montpellier. © Web Gallery of Art. This Sunday we will hear the story of God's calling to the young Samuel, the future prophet, in the Tabernacle during the night. In the Psalm we'll read, "I lie awake thinking of you; meditating on you through the night." In the Gospel lesson, Philip will tell Nathanael, "We have found the very person Moses and the prophets wrote about!"

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Sundays, 10:00 a.m.: Word & Table service

Sundays, 11:30 a.m.: Refreshments, conversation

Sundays, 11:45 a.m.: Moderated post-service discussion

Thursdays, 7:00 p.m.: Evening Prayers

Sunday, Feb. 1, 6:00 p.m.: Healing Service

(Sermon, cont'd.) as his beloved child. In your baptism God said, 'You are mine, and you are loved.' And in your baptism, God commissioned you to take up the work that corresponds with living a new life and bearing witness to God's reign. . . . (On the authority of this Gospel lesson from Mark, let me offer you this counsel: In this new year you will experience your share of ups and downs. *Remember who you are.* In this new year, you will succeed at some things, and fail at others. *Remember who you are.* In this new year, you will be tempted to become cynical. *Remember who you are.* In this new year you will become discouraged, and will be tempted to give up. *Remember who you are.* In this new year you may be tested, and tempted to doubt God's purpose for you. If that happens, *remember who you are.* As this new year unfolds, focus your energy not on how life will unfold, and what will happen, but on who you will be as it happens. Remember who you are, and remember Whose you are. If you do, I predict that 2009 will be one of the greatest years of your life."

Readings, 1/18: 1 Sam. 3:1-10; Ps. 63:1-8; 1 Cor. 6:11b-20; John 1:43-51.
1/25: Jer. 3:21-4:2; Ps. 130; 1 Cor. 7:17-23; Mark 1:14-20.

Prayer Emphases: Uruguay; Anglican Episcopal Church of North America; Middlesex United Methodist Church, Montpelier, VT, and the Rev. David Peterson; Foundations Academy, Boise; parishioners on Esquire Drive.