

Genesis 1:1-5

Psalm 29

Acts 19:1-7

Mark 1:4-11

Sermon January 7th, 2023

Our Identity and Purpose Is Declared in Our Baptism

For many years, God's people lived in the wilderness (**Image One**: desert). Longing to see the Promised Land. They felt anxious, scared, isolated. They lamented to Moses over and over again over their struggles. "We don't have anything to eat. We don't have anything to drink." At times they felt lost as a people. "Who are we? What is our purpose? Why did you take us out of Egypt if all that is going to happen to us is to die in the desert?"

And even though God listens to, and answers their lament, again and again. Even though God has identified them as God's people through Abraham. A people who will be the light to the nations. Even though God has given them structure/purpose to be this light through commandments and rituals. Even though God reiterates again and again through Moses to the people that getting to the Promised Land is still a reality. At times they feel lost. They question their identity. Their purpose.

The wilderness is a tough place to find oneself (**Image One**). Because there is a lot of uncertainty that hits us when living in the wilderness. Will we make it to the Promised Land? Or will we be stuck in the wilderness? Wandering aimlessly for the rest of our existence as a people?

Likewise, there are times in our lives where we feel we are living in the wilderness (**Image One**). Where our lives are in chaos. Where we wrestle with the uncertainty. Where we long to see the Promised Land. Where we long to experience God's healing and redemptive love.

For example, a loved one dies, or you go through a breakup with a friend or a spouse or a business partner. You struggle with all the uncertainty that comes with living into the future without this person. Feeling anxious and scared about what life will be like without this person. Someone that shaped your identity and purpose in a big way (**Image One**).

Or, you lose your job. Or, you are about to go through a major change/transition as a community. You are anxious and scared about how you/your community will make it through this time of transition. Will we make it to the Promised Land? Or will we be stuck in the wilderness? Wandering aimlessly for the rest of our existence as a people? (**Image One**)

Or, you are mentally or physically unwell. You lament to God. You ask for healing and redemption from your suffering. You question your identity and purpose as your health

condition is making it hard for you to be your real self. Whether it is from side effects from the medication, or from symptoms from the condition itself. Either way you are feeling lost as you find yourself stuck in the wilderness (**Image One**).

There are moments in our lives where we find ourselves living in the wilderness. Anxious, scared, isolated. Lamenting to God again and again. Pondering who we are, and what our purpose is?

Well, in our gospel, we see that Jesus enters the wilderness with us (**Image One**). Jesus comes to the Jordan and receives the waters of baptism. And through Jesus' baptism, his identity is affirmed (**Image Two**: baptismal font). His purpose is affirmed. Jesus is the Son of God. Jesus is the Messiah who has come to liberate God's people from suffering. Jesus is the new king who will invite us to leave the wilderness, and join him in God's kingdom come. Jesus' identity and purpose are clear. Jesus is ready to start his ministry.

And as John the Baptist states, Jesus invites us to the font where we too receive the waters of baptism (**Image Two**). Where we too are affirmed in our identity as children of God. Where we too are affirmed in our purpose to be active participants in Jesus' ministry in the world. Where we too receive the gift of the Holy Spirit that empowers us to do Christ's work. Revealing where Christ is liberating people from their suffering. Revealing where God's kingdom come is present.

Our identity and purpose are declared in our Baptism (**Image Two**). We are children of God who are to live our lives as disciples, followers of Christ's teachings.

Whenever we find ourselves in the wilderness (**Image One**) lost, questioning our identity, our purpose, Jesus breaks into the wilderness and turns our attention back to the font where our identity as God's children is affirmed (**Image Two**). Where our purpose as followers of Christ is affirmed. Like the voice from heaven does for Jesus. Like the manna, the water from the rock, does for the Israelites.

We are God's children who are called to follow Jesus in life, death, and in the resurrection. To be a light to the nations. To reflect God's love and grace in our community in all times and places. Even when we find ourselves living in the wilderness. Even when we find ourselves standing in the Promised Land. Wherever we are we are children of God revealing to people where Christ is at work in their lives.

Let us pray, gracious God, when we find ourselves living in the wilderness, open our eyes to see that through our baptism our identity as your children is affirmed. That through our baptism our purpose to continue the work of Your Son in the world is affirmed. And as we stand in the wilderness, may we have hope in your Promise that one day we will experience the joys of the Promised Land. **Amen.**