

## A Family Resemblance

[Text - Matthew 3:13-17]

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“When Jesus had been baptized, just as he came up from the water, suddenly the heavens were opened and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting upon him. And a voice from heaven said, ‘This is my Child, my Beloved, with whom I am well pleased.’”

It is truly significant that at his baptism, Jesus discovers the depth of his intimate relationship with his Heavenly Parent. With his baptism, Jesus humbly gets wet and gritty in the Jordan River, and fully claims his humanity. Through his Baptism, he is acknowledging his connection with every other child of God. And in doing so, Jesus shows you and me that we, too, can be completely human, as well as being completely beloved children of our One Heavenly Parent.

Unfortunately, many religious leaders in First Century Israel [and in Twenty-first Century America] don't like the notion that the Messiah - God's Anointed One - could be so down-to-earth. And they certainly don't like the fact that he chooses to identify so closely with the outcasts of society. Yet this is precisely how Jesus claims and *realizes* - makes *real* - his call and ministry as the Messiah [the Christ]. He is willing to rub elbows with society's so-called “untouchables”. He raises-up those who religion routinely put-down. He eats and drinks and joyfully celebrates Life with any and all who will receive him.

Sadly, it is Jesus' relentless, all-inclusive outreach of Divine Love and Grace, that ultimately brings about the fear-filled response by others to crucify him. Jesus' complete acceptance of his - and our - humanity, causes a chain reaction of fear, anger, hatred, and violence on the part of the religious establishment. Of course, that can be one of the great dangers of being true to oneself: you're going to make some people angry and afraid. However, one of the great gifts that God gives to us, is the gift of our own individual personality. Each person on earth is endowed with particular gifts and talents, strengths and weaknesses, abilities and even disabilities, which makes that person unique.

It therefore seems reasonable that one of the great gifts you or I can offer to God - and to one another - is the gift of our authentic selves. Jesus says it does no good to hide our Light under a bushel; instead, we should let it shine-forth for all to see! What sometimes keeps us from doing this, is the fear that when we put ourselves out there, our human flaws and frailties will also show. Fortunately, this is where the Sacraments of Holy Baptism - and Holy Communion - can prove extremely helpful for you and me today.

In and through Holy Baptism, you and I acknowledge our total dependence on Divine *Grace* to save and sustain us. We admit that we cannot make it on our own. We need God, *and* we need a viable connection to the imperfect and diverse - yet inclusive and Divine - Family of Faith. And regardless of when or where or how you and I receive that Baptism, it serves as an unshakable sign of our inseparable relationship with God and with one another. We *are* One Family! And our Baptism is the physical sign of our being immersed and embraced within this earthly - yet Eternal - Community of Divine Love and Grace. The more clearly you and I understand this, the more willing we are let go of those doubts and fears that keep us from seeing ourselves and others as truly beloved children of God.

Here at Brecksville United Church of Christ, we believe that the invitation to come to the Waters of Holy Baptism, and to partake of the Bread and Cup of Holy Communion, is an invitation extended to *all*. Our Sacramental Celebrations truly are “come as you are” parties ” - where Christ is our gracious and welcoming Host. We understand that Jesus Christ never turns-away anyone because they aren't pious or pure enough. In fact, he seems rather turned-off by those who feel that their own piety or purity puts them above others. The Good News that Jesus proclaims, is that God's Gracious Holy Spirit is available to us all - bringing us Light and Hope out of our darkness and despair; Unity and Wholeness out of division and dissension; Life and Love out of destruction and death.

As the Living, Loving Body of Christ, you and I have the awesome privilege - and responsibility - of sharing that Good News with others. Fortunately, we aren't alone in this endeavor, because that same Holy Spirit is also at work in you and me, molding us into a compassionate and supportive Family of Faith - a family where all are welcome, all are included, and each one is valued as a unique child of God. And that Divine Spirit which lives and grows among us, also helps you and me grow and develop more and more into the compassionate image and likeness of Jesus Christ.

Some people say that after a while, those who live together start to acquire similar habits, features, and even looks. And while developing a physical resemblance to those around us may be O.K. [particularly when you hang around such a good looking group as *this*], it's actually our similarity of inner character and core values that is truly significant. People also say, “You are what you eat.” Today, you and I eat a simple meal that fully represents our shared identity as the Body of Christ. This Sacrament, along with Holy Baptism, reminds us that we truly are

children of God, and brothers and sisters to one another. Hence, the remarkable family resemblance!

So, my beautiful family and friends, let's get busy and spread the Good News!

That those around us may know that they are *also* treasured children of God.

That they may truly believe that God is with them and for them.

That may know without a doubt - or even *with* their doubts - that they are truly welcome within this peculiar, yet precious, Family of Faith