

Sunday, January 10, 2016

Isaiah 43:1-7

Luke 3:15-17, 21-22

Ministry Beginnings

In this Saturday's Windsor Star is a two page insert of Windsor born babies in 2015 and with the photographs are the names of the infants their parents chose for them. Like the Canadian trend to name boys Aidan, Jacob and Ethan or girls Emma, Emily or Madison some of these names appear amongst these local babies. Although Ava, Isabella and Ella along with Liam Noah and Gavin are Windsor's favourite baby names they only slightly compare to the Ontario favourites of Sophia Olivia and charlotte or Jackson Lucas and Jacob. Yet what is so interesting about these names is that they have been used for centuries with different spellings and chosen for different reason and as each generation of infants grows up these names will seem dated only to be followed by a new trend with each popular television or movie that comes out. What does it mean to name a child today? Maybe it includes its meaning with hope for that baby's future.

Shakespeare wrote in Romeo and Juliet (II, ii, 1-2) "What's in a name? That which we call a rose. By any other name would smell as sweet." So that when we say the word "rose" we immediately have an idea of a delicate and fragrant flower. Therefore the name we are given by our parents is important and depending upon your behaviour, you may be called by your full name under different circumstances. Even as you went to school your teachers called upon you by name, the name your parents gave you at birth. Throughout your life, when you are recognized for an achievement or reaching a certain level of education it is by name you are called to receive accolades.

The prophet Isaiah wrote about the people of Israel and Jacob and how God would be their Saviour. God would gather them from the east and west so that he may better lead them into a life filled with new hope and loving relationships. God would call these people because God is the one who redeemed them and calls them by name to him.

This is an important part of the relationship between God and his people even though the people turned away from him. God never gave up on them. God created, formed and redeemed the people of that time because he loved them and he wanted them to become His faithful children. Many answered the call and heard their names, but not everyone.

When we look at the story of Jesus' life and ministry we must realize that Jesus was only on earth for @33 years. We have very little knowledge of his formative years as he grew up and went to school. He would have learned the trade of a carpenter from Joseph and would have worked in the shop helping his father and kept it going as a business until such time Jesus knew was upon him to beginning ministry in and for God the Father. God and Jesus were One with each other- as Jesus is God's Son, yet it was Jesus who earnestly prayed under different

circumstances as he prepared to fulfill the task and ministry God had envisioned for him to do on earth.

John the Baptist a close relative of Jesus, born just a few months before Jesus, child of Elizabeth and Zechariah did not work in the temple as did Zechariah. He became the voice in the wilderness which called people to prepare for the messiah. John taught the people about sharing, being fair, and keeping the truth. John taught with honesty and many who heard him thought he was the Christ. But it was John who clarified his purpose—I baptize you with water, he would baptize with Holy Spirit and with fire. The one who would come would be more powerful than John and he shared this good news to whoever wanted to hear it. Many people went to the Jordan River to hear John speak and they were baptised in the river as John had been lead to do with new believers.

Luke's version of this baptism story is fairly short- only 2 verses but it is followed by a list of 75 names representing the genealogy of Jesus as named through Joseph's line. Seventy five names- some repeating, some unique and different and many recognizable as key characters in our Bible. Yet it is what occurs in those 2 verses which is so significant to Jesus and to all who proclaim Jesus as Saviour today.

Jesus travelling with others who are not named by Luke went to listen to John's message of redemption and upon hearing this message, Jesus asks to be baptized by John. Luke's version of the story is clear and simple: "As Jesus was praying, heaven was opened and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: You are my Son, whom I love, with you I am well pleased."

The voice from heaven names Jesus—this is my Son. This is the beginning of Jesus identification, his naming as the Son of God. And through the image of a descending dove, he is blessed by the Spirit and he is God's Son. People present that day heard the voice of heaven speak- and they came and wondered who he was. They saw a dove- so graceful, gentle and quiet descended upon Jesus. Why? What makes Jesus different? How can he be God's Son— isn't he Joseph the carpenter's son? Why did God claim him as his? What did Jesus do to deserve that title—beloved Son. What is going to happen to him? What is going to happen to us for having seen this? Yet these questions go unanswered because Jesus, now filled with the Holy Spirit leaves the Jordan River and goes into the desert where he stayed for a very long time (40 days). There he ate nothing as he was tempted and tested by Satan so that he would be prepared for his ministry amongst the people of Galilee and as he fulfilled the promise of God.

When Mary gave birth to her baby boy in Bethlehem, Joseph named him what the angel had told him to call the baby. Jesus- this is the Greek form of Joshua which means 'the Lord saves'. Therefore even by Jesus' name, he will be the one to save his people from their sins. And how is he going to do this? Through God; for at the moment of Jesus' baptism, God calls Jesus My Son- whom I love and in the various gospel accounts of the same story we hear—how

God is pleased with him so far and will call him to fulfill the promises God made to his people so that the people will be in relationship with him and live as God intended and will live eternally with Him.

Years ago, every child that was born into our Christian country was baptized and part of the questions to parents was simply, "What is the baby's name?" This was a moment when the baby's name was recorded and in some traditions the names were recognized as their "Christian" names because of the celebration of the waters of baptism and this naming tradition.

Today many people are baptized at different ages, confirmed when we are older or younger yet the meaning is similar. You are named Christian when you are baptized. This is because you are called by God by the name your parents gave you and when baptized you are called God's beloved as His children in faith. And you are called to believe, serve and love others in God's name as faithful Christians.

This might have been years ago or even recently as God's Spirit came upon you. Maybe even in this moment the Spirit is moving amongst us and calling to your heart and mind and saying, "Don't be afraid. I am calling you (fill in your name here) you are mine. You need not be afraid because I will be with you throughout your life as I have been already but now I have a special task, purpose for you. Listen to the Spirit to guide. Listen to what is occurring around you and follow. Do what I am calling you to do- with the gifts I have blessed you with and your life will be full.

When one is baptized as Christ was baptized lives are changed. A new perspective is experienced and we see others differently and act differently. Baptism enables and empowers us to do the things that Jesus wants us to do here and now. We are able to identify with Jesus because He was baptized and we are able to love as he loved. Being called Christian- means we are named for the one we believe in and follow. Such identification shapes what we believe and claims us. Just as God says, "You are mine." We must make the choice to follow.

Back when the telegraph was the fastest means of long-distance communication, there was a story about a young man who applied for a job as a Morse code operator. Answering an ad in the newspaper, he went to the address that was listed and upon arrival, he entered a large, noisy office. In the background a telegraph clacked away. A sign on the receptionist's counter instructed job applicants to fill out a form and wait their turn until they were summoned to enter the inner office.

The young man completed his form and sat down with seven other waiting applicants. But after a few minutes, the young man stood up, crossed the room to the door of the inner office, and walked right in. Naturally the other applicants perked up, wondering what was going on. Why had this man been so bold? They muttered among themselves that they hadn't heard any summons yet and then took more than a little satisfaction in assuming the young man who went into the office would be reprimanded for his rudeness and be disqualified for the job.

However, the young man emerged from the inner office escorted by another man who worked for the company made an announcement. He stated to the other applicants, "Thank you very much for coming, but the job has been filled by this young man."

The other applicants grumbled amongst themselves and then one spoke up, "I don't understand. He was the last one to come in, and we never even got a chance to be interviewed. Yet he got the job. That's not fair."

The employer responded, "All the time you've been sitting here, the telegraph has been ticking out the following message in Morse code: 'If you understand this message, then come right in. The job is yours.' None of you heard it or understood it. This young man did. So the job is his."

This young man's entire life was changed because he understood the words. When we hear the story of Jesus' baptism, we must realize again the depth of the love God the Father had for His Son and how much Jesus would discern the meaning of these words which God spoke from the heavens: "You are my Son whom I love; with you I am well pleased." Jesus is God's Son; he responded to God's call to serve. Are we ready to respond or renew our commitment to Christ Jesus as we begin this New Year filled with new hope, opportunity and challenge? Are we willing to look at Jesus' life and learn from him what it means to answer the call of God? By and through faith we believe let us renew our faith as we begin ministry in this place and this time knowing that we are called by God and we are His.

Let us prayerfully sing "I Have Called YOU" and let us listen to the Spirit move amongst us and as we discern what this means to us this day.