

Sermon      Our Core Identity: We Are A Confessional and Connectional Church  
Scripture:   Mark 1:4-11      *The Baptism of Jesus*  
Date          January 8, 2011      Baptism of the Lord  
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### **Mark 1:4-11 New Revised Standard Version**

<sup>4</sup>John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. <sup>5</sup>And people from the whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem were going out to him, and were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. <sup>6</sup>Now John was clothed with camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. <sup>7</sup>He proclaimed, "The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the thong of his sandals. <sup>8</sup>I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."

<sup>9</sup>In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. <sup>10</sup>And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. <sup>11</sup>And a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased."

**Three themes are woven together for us today like a fine garment.**

**The first theme is baptism.** We recognize that Jesus was baptized. Jesus submitted to John's baptism, and blessing happened. The heavens opened. The Voice spoke. The Spirit descended. Ahhhhh. It's a holy thing to be in pilgrimage at the Jordan River where it all happened. Brings one closer to God somehow. The baptism of Jesus serves to remind us of our identity with Christ through **our** baptisms. Think life commissioning, life purpose. Baptism is a washing of renewal, a washing away of sin, a washing of spiritual cleansing, and an identification with dying and rising in Christ. Think about it. If someone is under water long enough without artificial breathing apparatus, what happens? Drowning. There's the key symbolism. We come up out of the water, as in a dying of the old self and a rising of the new self living for Christ, who died, but who was raised. If we claim to follow Christ, we will hear his call and will follow

him in baptism. Have you been baptized? If yes, I suggest you celebrate and claim it anew today. You are **the baptized!** If you haven't been baptized, what's stopping you? Ask your leaders about it, ask me if you like. When we follow Jesus we follow him in baptism. The first theme we are weaving is baptism.

**The second theme we are weaving together with others is ordination.** Today we ordain individuals among us who have heard a call for ordered service in Christ's name. We Presbyterians have three types of ordered service: deacons, ruling elders, and teaching elders. Deacons are collected as a Board of Deacons in the local church, and they are our servants in Christ, serving love and compassion and care. And then there is the session of elders. That's their collective term. You know: a school of fish, a pride of lions, a session of Presbyterian elders. Ruling elders serve on the governing body of the local congregation and beyond. The word Presbyterian comes from the Greek New Testament word, *presbuteros*, elder. And then there are teaching elders also known as Ministers of Word and Sacrament. You gather them collectively as a presbytery, together with ruling elders meeting and serving in the Lord's work. What we do today in ordaining these deacons and ruling elders is a holy thing, as old as the Bible, and needed today as ever for the common good. The second theme we are weaving today is ordination.

**The third theme woven today is that we join together in communion.** As in baptism we enter the community of Christ, so we are sustained in the community of Christ through communion. Sometimes we call it the Eucharist, meaning thanksgiving. Sometimes we call it the Table of the Lord, remembering that Table in the Upper Room where the disciples gathered. By whatever name, communion is God's great gift to us, uniting us with one another, with believers everywhere, even with those who lived and died in faith and who now live eternally with Christ Above. Our third theme today is communion.

**Did you notice behind me the Six Great Ends of the Church banners?** They are spectacular. Cloth, woven together, in purposeful, intricate, wonderful detail and design to tell a story. Thank you worship committee for raising these banners before us. Presbyterians for a hundred years have claimed the six Great Ends of the Church, or six Great Purposes of the Church, the first of which is the proclamation of the gospel for the salvation of humankind. We believe in the

gospel, the good news, of Jesus. We talk about and believe in the salvation of humankind. Jesus is our friend and brother and model and Savior and God.

**Put another way, we are a confessional and connectional church.** We confess, meaning we proclaim, our faith in Christ in a variety of ways, including the Apostles' Creed which we affirm on communion Sundays. We have a whole Book of Confessions to help us affirm who we are at our core. The result, in part, is that if you go to a Presbyterian church in Strassburg or Sacramento or San Juan Puerto Rico for that matter, the core beliefs and practices including worship will be familiar to you, because we are a confessional and connectional church. At our core, we maintain connectional relationships with brothers and sisters near and far. Jesus formed that when he gave us the Great Commission and the Great Commandments to love God and one another. Presbyterians as a whole are a pretty ecumenical bunch creating connectional partnerships in Christ's name.

**So, in review, there is a fabric of faith.** It is found in us being a confessional and a connectional church, coming together in baptism and communion and ordered service, all in Christ's name. Let us thank God for all of this, our holy heritage.