

Drenched in Love (Luke 3:15-17, 21-22 and Isaiah 43:1-4) by Reverend Victoria Ney 10/20/19

What's in a name? Most people think long and hard about names for their precious little babies long before they arrive in this world.

There's a cute story about a young mother who was doing her best to be on the lookout for a good name for her unborn child. One day she passed a building that had the word Nosmo on the door. It attracted her, and after thinking about it for a while, she decided to use that for her baby's first name if it was a boy. Sometime later, she passed the same building and saw the name "King" on another door. It seemed to her that the two names together sounded great—and so the boy was baptized Nosmo King. On her way home from the church where the baptism had taken place, she passed the building again. The two doors on which she had seen the names were now closed together, and what she read was not "Nosmo King," but "No Smoking."

I'm quite sure those doors caused that lady to feel great disappointment, and that's a shame because names are important. They are our identity.

Some of you may have noticed that my name is listed in the bulletin as Rev. Victoria. But most of you know I'm called Vicky. "Vicky" is the one I obviously consider the important one—it's my identity. My mother's name was also Victoria. I have always been Vicky. I doubt that any child wants to be her mother! So Vicky is who I am.

We all know names mean a lot. Think about it, it means a lot to us when people greet us by name. It implies that when they met us, we were important enough for them to remember who we are.

That's one of the reasons I particularly love the Isaiah passage that I just read a few moments ago. Those of you who know me, know it's my favorite passage in the Bible. The passage tells us how important we are. It's so personal. God says to each one of us, "I have called you by name. I know who you are. You are mine. You are precious to me."

Imagine! This is what God thinks of us! We are created, chosen, loved. This is the God who knows the number of hairs on our head, the God who claims us in baptism and tells us that we have been chosen, that we are unique, that we are created in the image of the one who loved us enough to come to us in Jesus.

Part of every Baptism experience, part of every worship experience is to come into God's presence gratefully and joyfully and be reminded of who we are and whose we are.

I know that some of the experiences in our regular week don't always give us affirmations about who we are. Let's face it—people can be unkind. In the workplace, bosses and co-workers can be insensitive or even insulting. Strangers can often be rude. Even people we love wound or injure our self-esteem and self-respect, sometimes unconsciously. But today, in this place, we remember again that no matter what messages we have been given by other people, no matter what has happened in our lives, no matter what will happen in the future, we are known, we are called by name, and we are precious to God.

The great reformer Martin Luther was often driven to despair over the circumstances in his life. While still a priest, he felt great guilt over any sin that he felt he committed. He obsessed over the smallest infraction, and he felt compelled to go to confession multiple times per day. There's a legend that tells us that the other priests would run when they saw him heading for the confessional! They were tired of all his minute sins!

Besides his own self-inflicted conflicts, he suffered through many ordeals in his battles with the church—he was called a heretic for going against the organized church and his life was in danger many times. (Let's face it, the church didn't do pleasant things to people they thought were heretics!) But in whatever circumstance Luther found himself, it is said that he would touch his forehead and reassure himself with these words: "I have been

baptized!” In other words, no matter what happened, he knew he had been baptized and he was loved by God forever.

So being named and claimed in Baptism is no small event.

It’s not just dressing up a child, sprinkling it with water, taking pictures, and having a party. It’s not just a hoop to jump through and a box to check. (Bottle feeding—check. Solid food—check. Baptism—check.)

Baptism isn’t even a security blanket for our children or us either. (We aren’t given magical words or promised a continual walk for the rest of our lives through a rose garden.)

It is so much more.

Baptism marks the beginning of the Christian life. It marks the beginning of new life. I realize that when we baptize babies and children, the new life part may not seem so significant, because they **are** so new in this life. But it marks the beginning of their new life in Christ and the beginning of a lifelong journey of faith and discipleship.

Let me highlight the fact that Baptism is not a one and done (not that there’s more than one Baptism!). What I mean is that it’s not a come to church once with the baby, “sprinkle it, and that’s all. Colette’s parents and all of you promised to nurture Colette in her journey of faith. That means there needs to be a connection with a family of faith that will help teach the child about God’s love in the Lord Jesus.

Which reminds me of a story about three pastors who got together for coffee one day and found that all of their churches had bat-infestation problems. Pastor Johnson said, “Well, I got so mad last week, I took a shotgun and fired at them. It made holes in the ceiling, but did nothing to the bats.”

Pastor Lunquist said he tried trapping them alive. Then he drove 50 miles before releasing them. Unfortunately, they all returned.

Pastor Stephens surprised the other two men when he said, “I haven’t had any more problems with the bats.”

“What did you do?” asked the others amazed.

“He replied, “I simply baptized and confirmed them. I haven’t seen them since!”

We don’t want that!

Baptism is also a public declaration of who we are. When we are baptized in the church, we recognize our identity and our place in a family. So Baptism is also the beginning of life in a community of believers—a family of faith.

And guess what? As the family of God, we Christians, have business in this world—we’re part of the family business—the business that Jesus showed us of helping and caring for others, seeking justice, and doing what is right and fair for all our brothers and sisters in every place and circumstance.

Because working in the family business is a big job, God provides us help, right from the moment of Baptism. Just as Jesus had the Holy Spirit descend on him visually as a dove, each one of us is given the gift of the Holy Spirit when we are baptized. If you noticed this morning, I made the sign of the cross on little Colett’s forehead and said that she had been sealed by the Holy Spirit (the Spirit was sealed within her). As baptized believers, each one of us has the Holy Spirit within us to help us and sustain us through this life.

There’s a humorous observation that when the disciples received their baptism with the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, they did not just rent the Upper Room and stay there to hold holiness meetings. Instead, they went out from there continuing the work of Jesus and showing God’s love to others with their lives.

You see, they found out you can't be drenched by God's Spirit and love in baptism and then keep it to yourself. Love needs to be given away. And there are lots of ways to do that.

Our Deacons are going to give love away today when they take communion and flowers to homebound people. Love is given away when people in our congregation family call each other to see how they are. Or when they send cards and notes showing that they care about what's going on. We regularly donate clothes and toiletries to the Salvation Army and Rescue Mission. We send a mission team to help fix up places torn apart by hurricanes. Even our children and youth do mission projects, like PBJ sandwiches for hungry people at the Rescue Mission, dress a girl around the world, so that third world country girls are not in danger from sex trafficking, and the Pajama Project bringing comfort to kids whose lives feel traumatic.

As I'm sure we all know, love isn't just given away by doing "projects." Love can be given away just by words of kindness and encouragement, praying for others, and giving financial help to works of love already going on.

Today as we remember our baptisms, as we remember that one day some years ago when we were drenched in love by the waters of baptism just like little Colette, know that we are drenched in love every single day by the God who knows our name and claims us as his own. God loves us and calls us and expects us to be about the work of Jesus—doing whatever we can to let others know that they are loved and precious to God, too.

Will you pray with me?

Prayer List: *Virginia, Jim, George, Betty, Beverly, Peggy, Dottie, Jack, Paul, Fred, Barbara, Doug, Larry, Charley, Kay, Michele, Marlise, Beth, Patricia, Allen, Wendy, Staci, Bobbi, Dunkin, Gloria and Nathan.*