

**Sermon Notes for 1/10/16 (Baptism of Jesus)
Preached at Jehovah Lutheran – St. Paul, MN**

Text: Luke 3:15-17, 21-22

Theme: THE FATHER'S PLEASURE IN JESUS – AND IN YOU!

The Point: Our Lord has miraculously claimed us as His own children and has pledged Himself to us as Savior, Father and Lord, speaking over us the word of blessing spoken over Jesus at His baptism.

Introduction: As a father, I take delight in my children. Well, I take delight in them most of the time, anyway. When they learned to speak their first words or take their first steps, Connie and I got a big kick out of it. When we got to put away the bottles and the diapers, we were both delighted. There were times when I would just peek into their rooms and watch them sleep as babies or toddlers, amazed at the privilege of caring for these precious gifts from the Lord. When Nathan brought home an “all A’s” report card or when Jeremy cut another second off his freestyle swim or when Sarah competed in the Junior Miss contest, I lost buttons off all my outerwear. Their accomplishments gave me pleasure.

Even more, when they displayed signs of maturity – caring for an otherwise unpopular friend, doing a household chore just to help, practicing patience and forgiveness, I have been even more delighted. These actions have shown that they are not just belonging to me, but they are gaining in wisdom and in favor with others. Of course, there have been times when our children have frustrated us or bugged us or embarrassed us or otherwise gotten under our skin. But by and large, I would say that I still take delight in my children. When I get a text message from them (or the less frequent phone call), even if it is asking me to do something for them (maybe especially then!), I am delighted. Our relationship as father to children (and theirs as children to me as father) is a highlight of my life. I suspect that most of you parents would say the same, even when children have been disappointing or hurtful to you.

Because of this, I suppose I should not be so surprised that God delights in me. But I am! After all, I know my own shortcomings, my own weaknesses, my own failures all too well. I know plenty of reasons why God should NOT be delighted in me – and if I tend to have a day with a short list of those, Satan whispers in my ear about those which I have forgotten. My words and thoughts, not to speak of my actions (or lack of action when I should act), continue to remind me daily that God really has no reason to delight in me.

In one of his sermons, A.C. Dixon told of an incident that took place in Brooklyn, N.Y. A detective who had been looking for a local citizen finally tracked him down in a drugstore. As the man began to make his purchase, the officer laid his hand on the citizen's shoulder and said, “You're under arrest; come with me!” Stunned, the man demanded, “What did I do?” The detective calmly replied, “You know what you did. You escaped from the Albany penitentiary several years ago. You went west, got married, and then came back here to live. We've been watching for you since you returned.”

Quietly the man admitted, “That's true, but I was sure you'd never find me. Before you take me in, could we stop by my house so I can talk to my family?” The officer agreed. When they got to his home, the man looked at his wife and asked, “Haven't I been a kind husband and a good father? Haven't I worked hard to make a living?” His wife answered, “Of course you have, but why are you asking me these questions?” Her husband then proceeded to explain what had happened and that he was now under arrest. He apparently had hoped that his record as an exemplary husband and father would impress the officer. Even so, he was still an escaped criminal. Though he was “right” with his family, he was all wrong with the state of New York. Just so, it is possible to be “right” in the eyes of those around you and approved by them – but to be absolutely wrong with God.

But this is the remarkable thing. God does not delight in me because of anything I have done (or left undone). He does not delight in you because of your cute smile or your wavy hair or your Midwestern

accent. He does not delight in you or me because we are succeeding (so far, 10 days in) in keeping our New Year's resolutions. Whereas my delight in my children may often be based on what they have done, God acts very differently. His love and mercy are unconditional. His delight flows entirely from who He is, not from what I have accomplished.

"God is love," St. John tells us in his first letter. God from all eternity has lived in a perfect spiral of love. The very names He chooses for Himself tell us this. "Father" – because His love is perfectly fatherly, familial, intimate. "Son" – because He freely receives and returns love, just as a perfectly obedient child. "Holy Spirit" – because this maelstrom of love seeks ways to expand the circle of love so that we can also taste of that delight which God displays.

So at the very beginning of His public ministry, Jesus steps foot into the Jordan River. John had been baptizing "all the people" (as Luke puts it), that entire crowd that gathered to him at the riverbank. And suddenly, right there in the midst of the crowd, Jesus shows up. No advance warning, no bolts of lightning, no fireworks display, no neon (or LED) signs. The other gospels refer to John's reluctance to baptize Jesus (since he knew that Jesus was far above John in power and authority and ministry). But he consented and poured the water over Jesus. And since this One did not need the forgiving power of baptism, but still humbled Himself to receive it and thus sanctified the water that we would need for our baptism and our forgiveness – for this reason, we hear the voice of the Father booming from heaven: "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased."

We know that the Father had been well pleased with His Son from all eternity. He had been well pleased that the Son had submitted to the Father's plan for the salvation of the world, even when that plan involved humbling Himself to incarnation, birth, suffering and death. He had been well pleased that this Son had lived a life of perfect obedience to the Father's will, even when that may have pitted Him against Mary and Joseph. And now that this Son, Jesus, is about to enter on His public ministry of teaching and discipling, the Father announces publicly His delight in this Son of His.

By God's grace, we have become God's children. We have been called by His name – "in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." Jesus is not ashamed to call us brothers and sisters. So when the Father speaks to Jesus, it is as if what He says to Him, He also says to us, since we are one with Christ. He is pleased with us – not for our sakes, but for the sake of the obedient Servant Jesus. Paul writes (1 Cor. 1:21), "God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe." It pleases God to save sinners. And once we have come to know Him and His amazing grace, (as the author of Hebrews puts it, 13:16), "do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased." This is an amazing and unbelievable thing, that God should be pleased with us and with the pitiful sacrifices we render to Him, since we have done so much to alienate ourselves from Him. And yet this is the primary word of Christian teaching, that for Jesus' sake God is pleased with us. We need that news, for the sake of our daily living and our daily battles against Satan and sin.

If it rested solely upon our accomplishment and our effort, there would be nothing that would please God. Our self-made good works, the very best things we could come up with and fulfill, as Isaiah puts it, are only filthy rags, literally shreds tainted with menstrual blood. Not only worthless, but unclean to the highest degree. Whatever we try to offer to God as our own sacrifice amounts to nothing. In fact, it is worse than nothing; it is highly offensive to God when we attempt to lay before His glorious throne those works and deeds that we think amount to something before Him.

But this is where a lot of people find themselves. And many, even among Christians, figure that is no big deal. [According to a 1993 poll] 88% of Catholics and a majority of Presbyterian and Methodist evangelizers [those who actively try to share their "faith"] believe that "if people are generally good, or do

enough good things for others during their lives, they will earn a place in heaven.” (*National & International Religion Report*, August 23, 1993) No doubt you have heard this sort of thing stated or at least implied, as if God were delighted in us because we try hard or do our best to keep the commandments or something of the sort.

A Christian author talked about an instant cake mix that was a big flop. The instructions said all you had to do was add water and bake. The company couldn't understand why it didn't sell – until their research discovered that the buying public felt uneasy about a mix that required only water. Apparently people thought it was too easy. So the company altered the formula and changed the directions to call for adding an egg to the mix in addition to the water. The idea worked. Sales jumped dramatically. That story reminds me of how some people react to the plan of salvation. To them it sounds too easy and simple to be true, even though the Bible says, “By grace you have been saved through faith...; it is the gift of God, not of works” (Eph. 2:8-9). They feel that there is something more they must do, something they must add to improve God's “recipe” for salvation. They think they must perform good works to gain God's favor and earn eternal life. But the Bible is clear – we are saved, “not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy” (Titus 3:5). Unlike the cake-mix manufacturer, God has not changed His “formula” to make salvation more marketable. The gospel we proclaim must be free of works, even though it may sound too easy to many people. (R.W.D. *Daily Bread*, June 2, 1992)

In that same passage from Isaiah that labels our righteous deeds as “filthy rags,” just two verses later the prophet rejoices, “Yet you are our Father.” Just because salvation is a matter of grace, we can be free in how we live over against others as we serve our Savior. How powerful is this message of reconciliation, proclaimed by Jesus and John and carried out in baptism? Ever hear of Steve Saint? Steve is the son of Nate Saint, who was a pioneering pilot for Mission Aviation Fellowship. Steve, along with his sister Kathy and brother Phil, was born in Ecuador, where the Saints had dedicated their lives of service to Christ. On January 8, 1956 (just before Steve's 5th birthday – we are just 2 days past the 60th anniversary of that event) Steve's dad Nate and four other missionaries (Ed McCully, Jim Elliot, Peter Fleming, and Roger Youderian) were massacred by Woadani (Auca) Indians in Ecuador. (Nate had landed his plane on a nearby beach just a few days earlier, seeking to make contact in order to share the Gospel with the Woadani, who were known to be a violent and dangerous people.)

The grieving family moved to Quito, where Steve attended elementary school. Within a few years of Nate's death, Nate's sister Rachel (Steve's aunt) and Jim Elliot's widow Elisabeth made peaceful contact with the Woadani and lived with them in the jungle. Steve spent his summers there and learned much about jungle life, building relationships with many of the Woadani tribe. In June of 1965 Steve (then 14 years of age) was baptized by two of the men who had executed his father and the other missionaries, men who later had responded to the Gospel and committed their lives to Jesus Christ. That is power, isn't it? Nate once wrote this: “People who do not know the Lord ask why in the world we waste our lives as missionaries. They forget that they too are expending their lives . . . and when the bubble has burst, they will have nothing of eternal significance to show for the years they have wasted.”

Conclusion: Our gracious heavenly Father has miraculously claimed us as His own children and has pledged Himself to us as Savior, Father and Lord, speaking over us the word of blessing spoken over Jesus at His baptism: “You are my child, whom I love.” This news means our lives are full of eternal meaning and significance. This news should move us to live fully dedicated to His praise and glory, for our eternal future is secure, and we can live all-out for Him, regardless of the consequences that we may face. So live assured of His love, confident of His presence, and secure in His delight in you, for Jesus' sake. AMEN!