

Sermon 2009 Baptism of Our Lord
Text: Mark 1:4-11
Theme: "Water is Thicker than Blood"

Were you raised in a family where the siblings could say the meanest, nastiest things in the world about one another, but no one from outside the family had better say anything? That's how it is in most families I think. We tend to be nastiest to those people who we know best, but we also tend to be most protective of the same people.

There's an old saying, "blood is thicker than water" and I don't really know the origin of that saying except that it is attributed first to Sir Walter Scott. I suspect it came out of the late 19th century when immigration from Europe separated many families and left some on one side of the Atlantic Ocean while others went across to a new world. The upshot of it is, however, that when all is said and done, whatever the differences, we tend to defend our family. And if asked why, I am not sure if we could always articulate an answer. If there is a deeply loving relationship, then it is easy. I defend my family because I love them. But even in families where there are not very deep connections, they still defend one another. That is family loyalty and no one wants to find himself caught in the middle of that.

In our readings today from the Word of God, we see three different facets of this family loyalty in action. Only God puts a different twist on it. From God's perspective, we are not different families, but one family both by faith and by biology. By faith of course, we are connected through Christ who is our brother. But even by biology, do we not all descend from Adam and Eve, or even later, from Noah? There is no one here today who is not biologically related if we go back far enough. So when God talks about family, remember that he is not concerned with petty legal documents or national boundaries or ethnic and cultural expressions.

When God is talking about family, he is talking about a longer history than any of us can remember, but which he has watched and in which he has actively participated since the advent of time. But, first and foremost, he is talking about faith. For, as we have established, we are all family biologically, so the difference is not who is accepted, but who excludes himself.

Blood begets biology. We are all connected to one another by blood. We are all Homo sapiens. We all have the same organs, chemical make-up, et cetera. Since we have all biologically descended

from Adam, we are biologically connected to the promise that was made to him after the fall. In Genesis 3:15, God promised us that though the devil had won the battle the Lord would win the war. The Lord would use biology to save the world. The Savior would come into the world by being born of a woman. Satan had created this mess, and now Satan would suffer the torment of the unknown. True, that because of the sin into which Satan led them, Eve would bring forth children in pain and Adam would toil to care for his family, but each and every time a son was brought forth, Satan had to wonder, is this the one?

For centuries sons were born and surely Satan worried over every one being The One. He tried to stop the biological lineage. In the days of Noah, he worked overtime to try to kill the faith of every living person so that God would give up on his creation. Only Noah and his family were left. But God delivered them through the waters of the flood. It was back to work for Satan.

He used Pharaoh to oppress the people of God. He even had the midwives slaughter all the male Hebrew babies once he had determined that it would be through the Hebrews that God would send

The One. As you know, he missed one, who was delivered through the waters of the Nile and would grow up to lead God's people into the Promised Land.

When Satan had figured out that the Savior had been born in Bethlehem, he made a last ditch effort to kill him by killing all of the male Hebrew babies. He missed again as Joseph and Mary crossed over the waters of the Nile into Egypt. And so, just as God had promised, the Savior had come via biology, the biological brother of all mankind, to save the world from sin by taking the sin upon himself and paying for it with his soul.

Now the biological connection had been completed and all mankind was saved, unless they didn't wish to be. That's the thing, just as God didn't force Adam and Eve to be faithful to him, just as he didn't force the people of Noah's day to be faithful, just as he didn't force the people of Israel to be faithful, neither does he force any of us to be faithful. Salvation has been accomplished for us – that is the power of blood. We can reject that salvation – therein enters the power of water, Baptismal water to be specific.

Water is thicker than blood. The difference between a saved and an unsaved person is not that Christ has come for one and not the other. Christ has come for both. The difference is that one has faith and one does not. As powerful as the blood connection is, the water connection is what finally matters.

When Jesus was Baptized in the river Jordan we hear some very important words said to him. "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased." Thereby the waters of Baptism become the means by which we are connected by faith. All people are connected by blood, but only the chosen few are connected by faith. It is through the waters of Baptism that God transfers what he says to Jesus, our biological brother, and applies it to each of us as well.

Because God loves Jesus, and is well pleased with him, he also loves all who have followed Jesus through the waters of his grace. When God says these words to Jesus, he says them to you and to me. You are my Son or Daughter, whom I love; with you I am well pleased. Listen carefully to what God says to you, because these words are powerful for you.

You are not a shirttail relative twice removed. You are his son or daughter. It is you whom he loves with the exact same love as he loved Jesus. Think of what that means for your life. Think of the power that gives you.

The water of your Baptism gives you absolute power over life. Satan will continue to attack the creation as he always has. He no longer has any hope of winning and he knows that. Now he is just the spoiler. He'll throw death and disease at us. He'll launch financial challenges and job loss. He'll try to make us believe that we are all alone. But whatever slings and arrows he throws at you, you can beat him, because you are washed in the water of Baptism.

By Baptism and by blood you are part of Jesus' family and the devil wouldn't dare try to go up against Jesus. He knows what's going to happen to him the next time he sees Jesus and he's not looking forward to that. He will take us on individually, if we let him, but he wouldn't dare take on the family. So the further away you get from the family, the more vulnerable you become.

When we consciously sin, we walk away from the family and separate ourselves from the very thing that protects us. When we

choose the world over God, when we treat others as though they don't matter, when we lie and cheat, we make a conscious choice to court Satan because we think it might be fun. And when we toy with Satan and loose, it is not because the family has abandoned us. It is because we have walked away from the family, from our brother Jesus and his bride the Church, and from our Father, and when we do that we loose our power and we become vulnerable.

You are God's sons and daughters by both blood and water. You are family. Stay close to the family, and live in the power and joy that has been purchased for you by our brother. AMEN.