

TITLE: "A New Last Name"

TEXT: Matthew 3:13-17 (NT p. 3)

¹³Then Jesus came from Galilee to John [the Baptist] at the Jordan [River], to be baptized by him. ¹⁴John would have prevented him, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?" ¹⁵But Jesus answered him, "Let it be so now; for it is proper for us in this way to fulfill all righteousness." Then he consented. ¹⁶And when Jesus had been baptized, just as he came up from the water, suddenly the heavens were opened to him and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him. ¹⁷And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased."

Introduction – What's in a name?

Once a man, who had just immigrated to America, took his pregnant wife to the hospital where she was immediately brought to the delivery room. The man sat in the waiting room and later his brother came to wait with him. Finally, a nurse came to the waiting room and told the dad that he was the father of twins, a boy and a girl! That dad was so overwhelmed that he fainted.

It was the custom in his native country for the father to name a baby as soon as it was born. With the dad out cold, the mother asked his brother to give names to the babies, which he did.

When the new dad woke up, he was told that his brother had already named the twins. The dad was shocked. "My brother is an idiot, a numbskull! He is the LAST person in the world I would let name my kids.... What did he call the girl?"

When the nurse said, "Denise," the dad was relieved and said, "Well, that's not bad. In fact, I kinda like it! What did he call the boy?"

She said, "Denephew."

What's in a name? ...Although our first or middle name can be the name of a relative past or present, it is really our last name that connects us to a particular family. My name really means, David Charles of the FAMILY Robinson. But whatever our family name, when we accept Jesus Christ as our Savior, and are baptized, we are given a NEW last name and this new name is what I will be preaching about this morning.

1. Infant baptism, adult baptism

When a baby is baptized, three things happen.

First, God promises that he will be with that child in a special way as long as she or he lives. This does not mean that the baby is “automatically” saved. It does mean that God will continually keep knocking at the door of his or her heart.

Secondly, parents of the child confess their faith in Jesus Christ and commit themselves to raise their child as a Christian.

Thirdly, our church family commits themselves to help in the process of raising this child as a Christian. Many of you here have made that commitment over the years and I want to thank those here for supporting our church family. I want to especially thank Sunday school teachers and youth leaders for honoring their commitment in this way.

If a baby or young child is baptized, she or he has nothing much to do with proceedings and of course the faith of the parents and congregation is what has the child there and not the faith of the child. Therefore when the child becomes a teenager, I hold what is called a confirmation class, where teens learn about faith, prayer, the Bible, worship, baptism and communion, giving and helping others. Then they CONFIRM the Christian faith for themselves when they join the church.

Adults and young adults who have not been baptized, go through the same process of taking the class, affirming their faith when they join the church and then becoming baptized.

2. Baptism, a step toward God

Much of our life is the result of the decisions we make, the constant procession of roads taken, and not taken. This reminds me of the poem by Robert Frost “The Road Not Taken” (*Mountain Interval-1920*)

TWO roads diverged in a yellow wood,
And sorry I could not travel both
And be one traveler, long I stood
And looked down one as far as I could
To where it bent in the undergrowth;

Then took the other, as just as fair,
And having perhaps the better claim,
Because it was grassy and wanted wear;
Though as for that the passing there
Had worn them really about the same,

And both that morning equally lay
 In leaves no step had trodden black.
 Oh, I kept the first for another day!
 Yet knowing how way leads on to way,
 I doubted if I should ever come back.

I shall be telling this with a sigh
 Somewhere ages and ages hence:
 Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—
 I took the one less traveled by,
 And that has made all the difference.

Every road we take, every decision we make, either leads us closer TO God or farther away FROM God. Some of the steps that lead us TO God:

Saying, “Yes,” to Jesus Christ and asking Jesus to enter our lives.

Stating our faith in Jesus Christ before others.

And being baptized.

These are all steps that lead us TO God and if we take those steps, and then take the time to LISTEN to God, God will guide and direct us as long as we live and forever and ever.

3. What the baptism of Jesus means to us

What does baptism mean to us PERSONALLY? Let me read you one of my favorite real life stories (“A Genius for Loving” by Marry Ann Bird from [Guideposts](#) 1/85).

I grew up knowing that I was different, and I hated it....I was born with a cleft palate, and when I started to go to school, my classmates—who were constantly teasing—made it clear to me how I must look to others: a little girl with a misshapen lip, crooked nose, lopsided teeth, and ...garbled speech....By the age of seven I was convinced that no one outside my own family could ever love me. Or even like me.

And then I entered second grade, and Mrs. Leonard’s class. I never knew what her first name was—just Mrs. Leonard. She was round and pretty and fragrant, with chubby arms and shining brown hair and warm, dark eyes that smiled even on the rare occasions when her mouth didn’t. Everyone adored her. But no one came to love her more than I did. And for a special reason.

The time came for the annual “hearing tests” given at our school. I was barely able to hear anything out of one ear, and was not about to reveal yet another problem that would single me out as different. And so I cheated.

I had learned to watch the other children and raise my hand when they did during group testing. The “whisper test” however, required a different kind of deception: Each child would go to the door of the classroom, turn sideways, close one ear with a finger, and the teacher would whisper something from her desk, which the child would repeat. Then the same thing was done for the other ear.

I had discovered in kindergarten that nobody checked to see how tightly the untested ear was being covered, so I merely pretended to block mine.

As usual, I was last, but all through the testing I wondered what Mrs. Leonard might say to me. I knew from previous years that the teacher whispered things like “The sky is blue” or “Do you have new shoes?”

My turn came. I turned my ear to her, plugging up the other solidly with my finger, then gently backed my finger out enough to be able to hear. I waited, and then came the words that God had surely put into her mouth, seven words that changed my life forever.

Mrs. Leonard, the pretty, fragrant teacher I adored, said softly, “I wish you were my little girl.”

Conclusion – Our new names

That is what God says to us when we are baptized. In fact, God does not just say, “I WISH you were my child,” God says, “You ARE my child.”

When Jesus was baptized, God said, “This is my beloved son.” When you are baptized God says, “You are MY beloved daughter” or “You are MY beloved son,” and so we become sisters and brothers of Jesus. ...And we get a new last name.

So, in a few moments,

Madison Waters will become Madison Waters of the family of God.

Elizabeth Waters will become Elizabeth Waters of the family of God.

And they will join those of us in this church family, who are also of the family of God, and we will all be members of God’s family now, forever and ever and ever.

Amen.