

“The Truth about Who We Are”  
August 25, 2019  
St. Paul’s UCC Church  
Rev. Mary Beth Mardis-LeCroy

**Exodus 20:16**

You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.

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

As the people were filled with expectation, and all were questioning in their hearts concerning John, whether he might be the Messiah, John answered all of them by saying, “I baptize you with water; but one who is more powerful than I is coming; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand, to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his granary; but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.”

Now when all the people were baptized, and when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, the heaven was opened, and the Holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, “You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.”

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Welcome to our ninth week on our sermon series, “The Music of the Ten Commandments,” where I will not only preach in spoken word, but will interpret these Ten Words, or Gifts, in the form of song.

Today, we look together at the ninth commandment, “You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.” To get into this commandment, I want to first get into baptism.

**“Wade in the Water”** (traditional Gospel hymn)

*Wade in the water, wade in the water, children.*

*Wade, in the water. God's a-gonna trouble the water.*

Who's that young girl dressed in red? (God's a-gonna trouble the water)

Must be the children that Moses led. (God's a-gonna...)

Who's that yonder dressed in white? (God's a-gonna...)

Must be the children of the Israelites. (God's a-gonna...)

If you don't believe I've been redeemed, (God's a-gonna...)  
Just see that Holy Ghost a-looking for me! (God's a-gonna...)

The story we read this morning from the Gospel of Luke is all about baptism. It opens with John the Baptist, out in the wilderness, preaching and baptizing all over the place. John is drawing such a large crowd that some people have even begun to speculate that *he* might be the Messiah, the promised One of Israel. But John nips this in the bud. "Don't kid yourselves," John says, "I baptize you with water, and that is all good and well. But the Messiah will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. And when he shows up, you'll know it."

And sure enough, before too much time goes by, that's exactly what happens. All the sinners are coming out to be baptized. But among them is a young, unknown carpenter from Nazareth. And *he* comes to be baptized as well, to be baptized along with *them*. And as he is praying, the heavens open up, the Spirit of God descends, and a voice declares, "You are my Son, the Beloved. With you I am well pleased."

"You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased," says God. I love these words so much!

Here, God declares to Jesus, "I am pleased with you." Actually, I think that translation puts it a little too mildly. The word carries a strong sense of acceptance and joy: "I delight in you. You are precious to me."

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...You know, Jesus' baptism is not only for Jesus. Whether you were immersed by the Baptists or sprinkled by the Methodists or christened by the Catholics, in baptism, we are joined with Christ. So it's not only Jesus' baptism, it's *our own* baptism we read about this morning: the heavens opening up, the Spirit descending, the voice speaking – all of that is about you, about me, about us. Because Jesus' baptism is *our* baptism too.

Back to the ninth commandment. "You shall not bear false witness."

What does it mean to bear false witness? I looked it up, and found this definition: "To lie about or misrepresent the truth about some event, person, or thing."<sup>1</sup> It's the person part – misrepresenting the truth about a person – that interests me this morning. This ninth commandment tells us not to lie about anyone else, not to call them something they are not. It's to not think badly, or talk badly, about someone else. Practicing the ninth commandment is yet another way to love our neighbor.

But, listen to this, Church: in order to do that – in order to not lie about our neighbor – we need to not lie about ourselves. We have to love ourselves before we can love anyone else.

### **"I Know My Name" (MB Mardis-LeCroy)**

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<https://www.bing.com/search?q=what+does+it+mean+to+bear+false+witness&form=EDGHPT&q=AS&cc=US&setlang=en-US&plvar=0>

I know my name: it is Beloved.  
I know my name: it is Delight.  
I know my name: it is Beloved.  
Your love will hold me close and keep me in the night.

Oh the world, it tries to tell us who we are.  
People try to hurt us, try to tell us lies.  
But, O God, you always tell the truth to us:  
That we are known and loved and precious in your sight.

When we believe those lies, what do we do with them?  
We treat our neighbor just as badly as we feel.  
And so we bear false witness, both to them and to ourselves  
But you, O God, will tell us what is real.

So help us, God, to know the truth:  
And help us, God, to know which way to go.  
And help us, God, to believe only what you say to us.  
Help us love ourselves and others. Help us know.

Before we can love our neighbor, which means knowing and telling the truth about who *they* are, we must first love ourselves. We must first know the truth about who *we* are. And our baptism is the first step in helping us do just that.

Who are you? Who are you, really? Sometimes we tell ourselves all sorts of lies about who we are. We tell ourselves that we are stupid, or ugly. We say to ourselves that we are too young, too old, useless, no good. We start to believe we are worthless. Undesirable. Unlovable.

And, people of God, when we think this about ourselves, we are bearing false witness. We are bearing false witness against ourselves.

So we need to know the truth. We need to know the truth about ourselves. We need to know our real name. And we hear it in our baptism. Here is our name: Beloved. Delight. Precious. We are beloved children of God. We are God's delight. We are precious in God's sight, known and loved and cherished by the God of all creation. *That* is who we are.

And God will keep reminding us of that, as many times as it takes. That's why we say so often, "Remember your baptism! Remember your true name. Remember how God absolutely delights in you."

No song captures this better than David Haas' "You Are Mine."

**"You Are Mine"** (David Hass)

I will come to you in the silence. I will lift you from all your fear.  
You will hear My voice. I claim you as My choice: Be still, and know I am near.

I am hope for all who are hopeless. I am eyes for all who long to see.  
In the shadows of the night, I will be your light. Come and rest in Me.

*Do not be afraid, I am with you. I have called you each by name  
Come and follow Me. I will bring you home. I love you and you are mine.*

I am strength for all the despairing. Healing for the ones who dwell in shame  
All the blind will see, the lame will all run free. And all will know My name

I am the Word that leads all to freedom. I am the peace the world cannot give  
I will call your name, embracing all your pain. Stand up, now, walk, and live.

Thanks be to God!