

## Sermon for July 18, 2021

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Today's theme is God claims us.

What does it mean to be claimed?

First picture an airport luggage **claim**. There is often a large conveyor belt cycling luggage around in a circle for all passengers to view and **claim** what is theirs. Bags are marked with luggage tags, tied with identifying bows, selected for their unique patterns or florescent colors to be easily identified and scooped up by anxious travelers pleased that they can reclaim what is theirs. Almost inevitably however, there is at least one lonely bag that remains after the crowds have departed. As you watch the bag riding alone on the conveyor, one can't help but wonder why that bag hasn't been claimed. Is the bag lost? Did it miss its connection? Get shuffled along on an incorrect flight path? Or maybe someone is afraid to claim it because of what is inside? Undesirable? Damaged? Or did the owner forget about it? Not care enough to make arrangements to claim it?

To be claimed is to be identified, scooped up, taken in, desired, kept. If not claimed we feel left alone, unwanted.

There are times we all feel like that bag. Unclaimed. We wonder is there anything special about us that makes us claimable? We feel lost in the mix, alone on an unexpected path, missing connections. We wonder is anyone looking for us - anxious to identify and scoop us up? Does anyone remember us? Care enough to put forth extra effort to find us? Who is brave enough to claim us despite our undesirable contents or damage? We all long for someone to reach out – "I claim this one. This one is mine."

Today in our "River of Life" theme text, as Jesus comes up out of the Jordan River, having been baptized by John, a voice from heaven speaks "This is my Son – the Beloved." Claimed. God says "I claim you. This one is mine. Beloved."

This is God's promise to us as well. In Jesus, through the power of the Holy Spirit, we are claimed – sought out, identified and taken in. God says "I claim you. You are mine. Beloved." And while this claim may not be marked with a luggage tag or fancy ribbon, we are given a tangible sign, a marking to reassure us that there will never be a time that we are left alone, cycling unwanted, even when we are undesirable and broken. Splashed with water we hear the words "Child of God, you have been sealed with the Holy Spirit and marked with the cross of Christ forever." Forever. You will never again be unclaimed.

What a promise! And not only has God claimed you as beloved child but in Jesus through the power of the Holy Spirit you have been brought into the family of God forever. Many a child and parent have joking struggled with whether or not to claim one another. Children stating "Mom, I will not be seen in public with you wearing that" or after a bad dad joke "I don't know

him.” Parents during their child’s self discovery phase or public behavior sometimes find themselves wanting to melt away from surrounding eyes that identify the family connection. Many a sibling or next generation family member hoping to fly under the radar, has dreaded the moment when their last name is identified and linked to an older sibling, parent or grandparent. We are not always quick to claim one another, to feel claimed by our family groups.

However, splashed with the waters of baptism we ARE forever claimed within the family of God, made siblings in Christ. As part of the baptismal liturgies we speak to one another - “We welcome you into the body of Christ and into the mission we share.” In this family we are called to claim one another, no matter how embarrassing, no matter the public response, throughout all generations.

In our baptisms, as in Jesus’ baptism, God claims us and calls us to claim one another. And this claim is marked with water, traced on your brow. As Luther states in the Small Catechism which has been printed in your bulletin today. It is not water that does these things, but God’s Word with water and our trust in this Word. Water by itself is only water, but with the Word of God it is life-giving water which by grace gives us new birth through the Holy Spirit. Splashed with water day after day our old self is drowned through daily sorrow for sin and repentance and a new person comes forth to rise up and live in trust. Day after day after day we are claimed.

Everyday as we drink and wash and stand in the rain -in the water we are invited to remember. This last year the Episcopal Diocese put forth an invitation to join the Handwashing Doxology. Each time you wash your hands you are invited to sing the song you are about to hear Kristin sing. She will sing it through once and the second time through you are invited to join in. Not only is this doxology the length of time you are encouraged to wash your hands but it is an excellent way to remember God claims you day after day after day.

#### KRISTIN LEADS SONG

You are no longer cycling the conveyor belt of life hoping to be claimed. God has claimed you! Daily be splashed with water and remember. Then filled with the Holy Spirit join in the work of spreading this good news. Keep your eyes open; who might feel like they are cycling alone. Speak the truth – Child of God, sibling in Christ, you are claimed - beloved!