

**Baptism of our Lord-Year A**

**January 9<sup>th</sup>, 2011**

**Isaiah 42:1-9; Matthew 3:13-17**

**“Life Aligned with God”**

**This sermon was preached by Pastor Jim Page at Trinity Lutheran Church**

Dearest brothers in sisters in Christ, may the blessing of this new day, the joy found in worshipping together, and the comfort of God’s word nurture your faith. Amen.

This morning we are beginning a four week sermon series titled ‘Life Aligned with God’. It is a series in response to the fact that our lives are complex and marked with a variety of tasks, challenges, and responsibilities. These realities pull us in various directions. Here at the offset of a New Year, it’s only fitting to focus on God at the center of our lives in who we are, where we work, and in our relationships. Our hope is that this series, along with weekly worship, helps you in developing, nurturing, and living out your faith under God’s guidance and love.

Our series has four unique themes.

Today, our theme of ‘**Life Aligned with God**’ takes us to the sacrament of baptism as the beginning of our lives of faith. As forgiven and given an identity by God we’ll look at the importance of God’s claim on our lives.

Next week, our theme ‘**Where do I start to align my life with God?**’ will focus on the practical fixture of faith development amid our various daily roles at home, work and everywhere in between.

In ‘**How do I align my life with God?**’ the struggle of daily faith for Zacchaeus in the gospel of Luke will present us to the daily gift of God’s grace in addressing our failings while living anew for God’s purpose.

Finally, aware of our identity, our roles, and God’s daily grace, ‘**When Life is Aligned with God**’ we will focus on ways of living out our faith in the world that blesses both our lives and those of others in God’s plan of redemption.

The Barna Group studies various trends in religion and culture through various surveys and studies. From December 11<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup>, 2010, they did a new study of 1,022 random adults in our country through a telephone survey. This study focused on New Year’s Resolutions and specifically, resolutions for 2011.

Previous studies show that 61% of our nation’s population have made New Year’s Resolutions at some point in their lives. More than 90 million adults, roughly two fifths of our nation’s population, say they will make such pledges for 2011.

Such efforts focus on change of a self-oriented nature. They are an attempt to save ourselves, to take back control of our time, our relationships, and our lives. We do this by addressing those life elements that have intentionally or unintentionally been pushed to the side in the past year.

Those pieces that have been pushed aside result in lost time, missed opportunities, frustration and perhaps a lost sense of purpose.

Resolutions, be they at New Years or during the year, are an intended alignment to assess who we are, what we are doing, and where we want to go with our life.

From the 1,022 people that were polled, the top resolutions for 2011 relate to weight/diet/health at 30%; money/debt/finances-15%; personal improvement (being a better person, organizing their life/home, and having more leisure time)-13%; addiction-12%; job/spiritual/educational were at 5%.

Surprisingly, few Americans state any improvement to their relationships with others, there are often only a handful of comments about marriage and parenting and virtually no responses on being a better friend. Only a small fraction mentioned improving their connection with God.

Regardless of your recognition of New Year Resolutions, all of us have the same goal of living lives that are marked by joy based on our **identity**...who we are, what we are doing, and where we want to go in life.

Our identity is shaped by various facets in our lives which pull us in various directions. Our age, our family, our friends, the names others place upon us, where we work, where we live and advertising all shape who we are. A prosperous industry is grounded in leading us to spend our dollars to acquire a certain identity and teenagers are the key players as primary consumers of products.

Identity is important...it brings security, a sense of self-worth, and an overall level of life satisfaction.

We can ask ourselves: What is our primary identity? Who are you?  
Is this based on your role at home? At work? Social groups?

As one man wrote, "I seem to be one person when I'm visiting my mother in the nursing home, another when I'm with my friends at the health club, still another at work, and someone else at church. Sometimes I have a hard time keeping all my separate lives straight. I feel like a chameleon. I wonder, Which one is the real me?"

"As a single mom, I feel torn to pieces by all the demands on my time. I try to do a good job at work and be a good parent to my kids and take care of my dad when he needs help. I have no time for myself. I feel overwhelmed. I feel as if I don't do anything well. My life seems to be falling apart into a million pieces."

And finally, "I looked forward to retirement and though it would be the best time of my life. But after a few months of golfing and a Caribbean cruise, I'm restless and bored. I still want my life to have meaning. I'm not ready to give up on life yet."

We heard today from the gospel of Matthew, "Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan, to be baptized by him."

When Jesus went to be baptized by John, God was connecting the dots between the John the Baptist, the proclaimer, and Jesus, the proclaimed. It marked an end to John's mission and a beginning to Jesus' ministry. It was there that Jesus received his identity for mission as the Spirit of God descended upon him.

In a similar fashion, as baptized Christians, we have a lasting identity that can easily be taken for granted. In the waters of baptism, we are reminded that we have been forgiven by God-our sins are removed, washed in the waters of grace, and loved by a God regardless of our failures and successes.

It is in baptism that we come to terms again of 'who' we are as beloved children of God and 'whose' we are under God's guidance and care.

Jesus' baptism was the foundational guiding piece as he lived, healed, and taught within God's ministry in the world.

Our baptism is the foundational guiding pieces as our faith leads us to live and serve within God's ministry in the world.

When we hear, believe, and incorporate this marvelous truth into our lives each day...we will have be empowered and freed to live our lives centered by God.

Today, this day devoted to baptism, we give thanks for the 46 baptisms here at Trinity last year, celebrate the baptism of Abigale and Ethan Scovil-the first baptisms of 2011, and give thanks for our own baptism.

It is in our baptism that we have a foundation given to us for daily living.

It is in baptism where we align our lives on God's gift to us as the Apostle Paul wrote so beautifully, "If anyone is in Christ, they are a new creation: old things have passed away; **behold all things have become new!**"

Thanks be to God. Amen.