

"Bring Sean Home" story on MSNBC Dateline-- A few nights ago

A father from New Jersey visited Brazil 15 times during the last 5 years to bring his son Sean home. 5 years ago, this mother traveled to her home country with her 4 year old son to visit but she did not return her New Jersey home. The father tried to see what happened.

The woman divorced her husband while she is in Brazil and married another man there. The father tried to get his son back, and the situation got ugly. But there was a turn-around; the woman died while giving birth to a baby girl. The new husband took custody of Sean saying that he belonged there.

Sean's father made every effort to bring his son back home saying that Sean was his son while the grandmother and uncle and all the family members claimed that Sean would rather live here.

Eventually, a few weeks near Christmas time, David got his son back in his arms and brought him back to the United States.

I am sure some of you may have seen this show. It was a moving story; as I was watching it, I, especially as a father, had sympathy for the father and even cried a few times.

Out of this dramatic story, there is one moment that really struck me. When the father and son came back to the United States, they spent their first night, the day after Christmas, in a hotel in Florida.

The next morning, an NBC reporter sat down with the father and asked this question, "David, you have been fighting during the last 5 years for this and here you are; you are reunited with your son. And you spent your first night together with your son. How was it?"

The father said, "Unbelievable." And the next question was (something like), "Did Sean call you *Dad*?" The father said, "No."

The next morning, they sat again and she asked the same question, "Did he call you *Dad*?" This time, "Yes, he did." And I could see how thrilled he was; it looked like that all struggle and turmoil he had to go through paid off when he heard that precious word--Dad.

To some of us, it may not sound that important; we just take it for granted. But to this father, it meant the whole world.

I have another story: when I was in seminary, I was a youth pastor at this Methodist Church in Philadelphia. And this couple got married in their 40's and had a baby boy; I think he was almost 2 years old. And one day during the prayer time, the mother shared with the congregation in tears saying that she would be so happy if she could hear just one word from her son—the word, "MOM."

Can you imagine a mother's only wish was to be called MOM? The problem was that the child was born with a problem and was not able to talk yet.

Mom, Dad, Son, Daughter...

These are precious words which we cannot take for granted. Those words are precious because they carry special relationships with them. You do not call a stranger Dad; you don't call a stranger Mom; you call them Mom and Dad because they gave you life; you call them Mom and Dad because they are connected to you in love, unconditional love.

Today we celebrate the baptism of the Lord. Jesus is being baptized in Jordan River. Before Jesus starts his public life, Jesus gets confirmed as the Son of God.

Today's Gospel text says, while Jesus was praying in the water, the heavens opened and the Holy Spirit came down upon him like a dove and there was a voice coming out of heaven,

"You are My beloved Son, in You I am well pleased.

This is the confirmation of Jesus' identity as the Son of God. This is a moment when the world heard clearly that Jesus was not the son of Mary and Joseph, but the son of God.

And God was pleased with him. God was just pleased with Jesus. There is no explanation; we do not need an explanation; it is a father-and-son thing; between son and Father, there is a bond, there is a genuine connection, and

there is an indivisible union. And the Father was just happy to say that Jesus was His Son.

But this connection is not just between Jesus and God; it is extended to us. You and I are part of this spiritual bond because we are also baptized in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Christian baptism is important; it confirms our new identity; it grants us a new status as the children of God.

We are all born sinners; Romans 3:23 says, we all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. And the end of sin is death (6:21). But God has given us this opportunity for us to be His children of hope and promise.

That’s through baptism; we come before God and acknowledge our weaknesses, confess our sins, and profess our faith that Jesus is our redeemer, savior, and Lord.

That means, we are accepting God’s invitation to the way of salvation.
That means, we are declaring that we want to be followers of Jesus Christ.
That means, we are promising that we want to live a different life—
a life that pleases God, a life that doesn’t follow the world.
That means, we are telling ourselves that life is not about us;
Rather it is about God and how we live up to the teachings and expectations of Jesus Christ.

The fact that we are baptized means that we are not ours; we are God’s.
This is because we believe that in our baptism, God was declaring that we are his sons and daughters.

Today’s Psalm 29 is a beautiful song full of praises.

The voice of the Lord is over the waters.
The voice of the Lord is powerful; the voice of the Lord is full of majesty. The voice of the Lord breaks the cedars. The voice of the Lord flashes forth flames of fire. The voice of the Lord shakes the wilderness.

Yes, it evokes our imagination and it lifts up our spirit. Whoever wrote this hymn must have been a great poet and great theologian too.

Yes, as baptized children of God, we are to listen to the voice of the Lord rather than the voice of the world; we need to pay attention to the voice of the Lord, not the voice of our own.

Just think of the New Jersey man who was desperate and didn't mind going to Brazil 15 times in five years to try to bring his son home.

As a father, he said, it was natural for him to do it. He just wanted to be the father of his son. He said any father would do it.

All he wanted was to be a father and he wants his child to call him Dad.
How simple is that! But it took him 5 years just for that.

I don't think that the people and family in Brazil were bad people; they also loved the child too; but as time went on, there were lies and threats... they said. In other words, they listened to the voices of their own; they listen to the voice of their fear.

But that's what we humans do.

God wants us to hear a voice from above.
It is not easy; the world doesn't want us to do that.

I don't think it was easy for Jesus either. That's why God let him spend some time in the wilderness first right after his baptism.

Preacher Barbara Taylor said: God does not care ... whether we are happy or not. What God cares about is the quality of our life; and the quality is to follow Jesus; and following Jesus means going beyond the limits of our comfort and safety. It means receiving our lives as gifts instead of guarding them as ... possessions."

Jesus heard a voice from above--the voice of the Lord-- not only in his baptism but all the way through his cross.

Christian journey is demands a decision. That decision is to follow Jesus ... anywhere he leads them. It is our "Yes" to the voice of the Lord.

Amen.