

You Are My Beloved

Luke 3:15-17, 21-22

This week celebrates the baptism of Jesus and reminds us to live as baptized children of God. Luke's version of Jesus' baptism is shorter and more succinct than Matthew's. It just says "when all the people were baptized and when Jesus also had been baptized." There is no conversation about who should baptize whom. What happens after the baptism is what Luke wants to emphasize. "When Jesus was praying the heavens were opened, and the Holy Spirit descended upon him, like a dove. A voice came from heaven; 'You are my Son the Beloved,' with you I am well pleased."

Jesus shows up and gets in line with everybody else seeking for their lives to be cleaned up by the waters of the river Jordan. Jesus, the one whom God will call "my child, the Beloved," gets in line with the rest of us. It's an expression of the astonishing humility and solidarity of the Incarnation. In Jesus, God comes alongside us, even to the point of joining us in a rite of repentance and renewal. It is a powerful reminder that arrogance has no place in Christian discipleship. Jesus gladly undergoes baptism to show us how Christians are to live humble, unpretentious lives. Indeed, following Jesus means setting out with him on this path of humility and solidarity, confession and grace, a way of love with which God is "well pleased." Jesus joins us in our openness to receive God's grace and Spirit.

When we are baptized, we join Jesus and all those who have gone before us wrapped together: the hurt ones, the brave ones, the weak ones, the ones full of faith and the ones with questions of faith in the love and grace of God. We are marked as God's own. We are marked as Children of God. We are marked for life eternal.

At the beginning of every year we read about the baptism of Jesus. We do it to remember our own baptism and what it means for our life and faith. When Jesus was baptized, God said "This is my Son, my beloved, with whom I am well pleased." God says the same to us. We are beloved!

What should we make of John's remark that Jesus will come with "his winnowing fork in his hand"? Is this an image of including some but excluding others? On the contrary, the metaphor points in the other direction: every grain of wheat has a husk, and farmers (even today) use wind to separate these husks, known as "chaff," from the grain itself; the goal being to save every grain, not to separate the good grain from the bad grain. This is a metaphor of preservation and purification, not division. What the wind and fire remove are the impurities: the anxieties, self-absorption, apathy, or greed that make us less generous, less fair, or less respectful of others. Each of us requires restoration, liberation from whatever "husks" are holding us back. Not to divide or destroy, but to connect, sanctify, purify, challenge, restore, and empower.

Jesus' baptism shows what our baptism is all about. How often do you think about or remember your baptism? When things are not going well, when you get down on yourself, do you say I am a beloved Child of God? Our baptism and the baptism of others is to remind us just how deeply loved we are by a good and gracious God. The basis of baptism is water; grace-filled water. Grace-filled water changes everything!

This is the promise in our baptism. It is first an act of God. God is claiming us as God's very own. God is saying you are my beloved child. God is declaring to us that simply because we belong to God that God is well pleased with us!!

Have you ever felt loved by God? Where were you? What were you doing? How was God's love communicated? How was it made real to you?

Can you say and feel and believe that you are beloved by God and that God is pleased with you? That is what we proclaim at baptism. Can you feel the waters of baptism that cleanse you and love you and forgive you? Let's begin the New Year by remembering and living the truth of our baptism. "**You** have been sealed by the Holy Spirit and marked as a Child of God forever."

Think about it – Pray about it – Live it

Bob