

Baptized and Beloved

King of Glory Lutheran Church

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Year B: Lent 1: Mark 1:9-15 In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. ¹⁰And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. ¹¹And a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased." ¹²And the Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. ¹³He was in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels waited on him.

¹⁴Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, ¹⁵and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news."

At the beginning of Lent, we hear again that we are God's beloved ones through Jesus' baptism. This Great Love is the answer to our identity, our growth, our temptations.

Just last week, was Valentine's Day. In 2023, it is estimated that consumers spent \$26 billion, on Valentines related purchases. Over half the population recognizes this day of love. Whether you are married, or have a beau, or are single for any reason, I hope that you had at least one person to tell you, "I love you." If you didn't keep listening.

On this first weekend of Lent, we hear again the story of Jesus' baptism and His wilderness temptations. Due to St. Mark's brevity of writing, it might not seem like there is much to this story. But that is not the case.

"You are my son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased."

Perhaps you had someone in your young life who said that to you regularly. Well, maybe not exactly in those words...not many people say 'beloved' very often. But you know what I mean.

"Hey, love you."

"Do you know I love you?"

“Love ya, have a good day!”

And if those words weren't said to you, perhaps your parents' actions said it instead. Consistent loving touch. Praise and sincere compliments. Really listening so you felt heard. They took an interest in your activities. Cared for your needs of clothing, food, and shelter. There are many ways for we adults, parents or not, to communicate love to the children and young people around us. They need us to keep telling them and showing them that we love them!

John the Baptist, Jesus' cousin, baptizes Jesus in the river Jordan. As Jesus is coming out of the water, it is as if an invisible curtain is drawn away. 'Jesus saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him.' In the Bible, heaven means God's dimension behind the ordinary reality.ⁱ

Jesus hears God's voice saying to Him out of these heavens, “You are my Son; the beloved; with you I am well pleased.” In that moment several things are happening. 1. God is naming relationship: Father and Son. 2. God is naming Jesus as Messiah. Messiah is the anointed one and Jesus has just been anointed by the Holy Spirit in the form of the dove. 3. God the Father reveals a great love for Jesus, the Son.

Now, this other reality of God's dimension may well go beyond our comprehension. A descending dove. A voice from the heavens. A divine proclamation of love. It's a mystery.

But isn't love a mystery? Isn't all love a mystery? And isn't love a mystery that we trust in?

How do couples stay married 30, 50, 70 years? That's a real mystery. But they do! They love one another and they trust in that love. Given that 118 million Americans are single (that's about every other adult)ⁱⁱ, the same is absolutely true of deep friendships. Between friends there is also love and trust.

Walking in faith is the same. So much of our Christian faith is trusting in another dimension we cannot see or completely understand. Yet we do learn to trust in God's love, God's presence, and God's grace.

Today (Yesterday) we celebrated the life of Don Specht. As I often say at funerals, I said Don was baptized and washed in God's love. Those wet waters are the outward sign and invisible symbol of an inward grace. (repeat) God's love.

Those wet waters are God's love for each of us because we are baptized into Christ. "You belong to Christ, in whom you have been baptized." God loves us, because God loved Christ. Christ represents all of us. Christ stands in for all of us. When we hear God's words to God's only Son, we can hear God saying it to us.

I invite you now to look at verse 11 of our Gospel text. I'm hoping that you will put your own name at the beginning of the sentence and change the gender as needed. So it would sound like this. "Ruth Ann, you are a beloved daughter of God; with you I am well pleased." Say it out loud.

Can you hear it? Can you trust it? Can you let it change your life? It is not a fake or bogus word. It is real. God has placed a grace filled, loving claim on each of our lives.

When I was in seminary, a pastoral care professor (one who taught us how to care for people) told us in lecture, that each morning as we washed our faces, we could make the sign of the cross on our foreheads to remember our baptisms. In doing so, we would remember God's love for us and God's presence with us each day.

A theology professor (one who taught us proper theology) caught wind of this. He was grumbling and going on about the breadth and depth of baptismal theology and what it meant. 'Putting a wet cross on your forehead,' he said in frustration, 'doesn't even come close to what baptism means.'

Both professors were correct. And...remembering our baptisms with a wet cross is practical theology. It's daily theology. Daily faith. It's a spiritual practice that helps us on our journey. An outward sign of an invisible grace + God's love.

Our theme for Lent is: In His Steps. Here is Jesus standing in the water with a verse from Romans 6:4, "Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life."

We are going to reflect upon spiritual practices which help deepen and grow our faith. This is a season of renewal. Yes, renewal! Not dreary church traditions that feel burdensome. Now, I'm not implying that you can't give up something for Lent. Of course, you can! But, if you do, then focus on how that renews your spirit. As we walk in Jesus steps, following His ways, then we are renewed!

I've made up a list of spiritual practices that are self-explanatory. In doing them, you might find your spirit feeling better, more hopeful, or even closer to God. You know exactly where you are and what you need this Lent. Choose what is the next right step for you in God's relationship with you.

- Daily devotions: World Hunger, Gathered into One, Word in Season
- Make a prayer list of family and friends who need prayer
- Pray for hard situations you might typically avoid: relationship conflict, world wars, refugee, healings. (These are not hard for God.)
- Walk the Chapel Labyrinth March 4-15 in the sanctuary!
- Donate money to World Hunger. Donate physical food to HNS.
- Consider volunteering
- Make the sign of the cross each day on your forehead. Remind yourself, "God loves me."

Remember,

We can trust in that divine, mysterious dimension which we cannot see.

We are baptized into Christ, therefore we are loved, just as Jesus was loved.

As we walk in Jesus' steps, we will find newness of life!

Amen.

ⁱ N.T.Wright. Mark for Everyone. Westminster John Knox Press. Louisville, KY. 2004. Pg 5.

ⁱⁱ <https://www.census.gov/newsroom/stories/unmarried-single-americans-week.html>