

“We Trust Our Belovedness”

Luke 3:21-22

First Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)

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When we hear the story of Jesus’ baptism, we often think only about what it meant for him. Of course, it seems we most often hear versions other than Luke’s - and all of the other gospels give us more detail about what’s going on around the baptism.

The others all mention John directly. And, as Corinne said before she read the scripture, we have become used to thinking of this story as a transitional story, a time when John hands over the baton to Jesus.

In the other gospels, this story is immediately followed by either Jesus’ time of temptation in the wilderness or by a story of some of John’s disciples leaving him in order to follow Jesus. Even in Luke, the very next sentence that we read after this story speaks of Jesus’ ministry beginning.

It is no wonder that we see this is a transitional story in his life.

And meanwhile, sometimes that means we read quickly past it. But, what if we sit with this story, maybe especially with this brief telling that we get from Luke, and wonder together about this idea of belovedness?

Again, I think we often just assume that Jesus was God’s beloved, so maybe we don’t spend much time thinking about it. After all, our understanding of Jesus is filled with messages about him being God’s son, about him being divine. Often we focus on those ways that he is different from us.

But what if the claim of belovedness that comes on the occasion of his baptism, isn’t just about Jesus being uniquely related to God? What if it isn’t a claim that is only made on his life? What if it is a truth that is available to all people?

What if we hear not only a declaration about Jesus in this text, but what if we also hear something about ourselves?

And shouldn't we?

We talk all the time about our faith being a commitment to follow in the ways of Jesus. At the communion table each week we say that when we eat of the bread we offer our bodies to continue Jesus' work in this world. And we are told time and time again in scripture about God's love for us, God's investment in us, God's creation of us. At both child dedications and baptisms, as part of our liturgies, we proclaim our identity as children of God.

Yes, Jesus was God's beloved child.

And, yes, we are, too. Each of us is God's beloved child.

Sit with that for a moment...

You are God's child...

You are loved.

Susan, you are God's beloved. Paul, you are God's beloved. Wilma, you are God's beloved. Steve, you are God's beloved. Avery, you are God's beloved. Each and every one of you - you are God's beloved.

What would happen if we really believed that? Because there is all sorts of evidence that we often struggle to trust our belovedness...we often live as if we don't believe it.

See, I am not convinced that God loved Jesus in a way that was unique. I do believe that Jesus lived in a unique relationship with God, as one who lived as such an open channel to God's love that he could live differently than most of us. I do believe that Jesus lived in sync with God in such a way that he was able to hear the desires of God's heart over the messages and demands of this world in ways that most of us struggle with.

Perhaps that is what is so different about the story of Jesus' baptism...not that God claimed him and proclaimed his belovedness, but that Jesus was able to hear that claim and to trust in his own belovedness.

Perhaps Jesus was different in that he knew he didn't have to earn God's love, but that he was invited to live into it.

So, what about us?

I wonder...what would happen if we trusted our belovedness?

I wonder how we would live differently if we understood our belovedness, not as something we had to earn, but simply as who we are?

I wonder what it would mean for us to embrace this part of our identity and then to live into it?

I wonder how we would be different if we left the house each morning remembering that we are God's beloved children?

How would that change how we live?

How would that change how we think of ourselves, how we treat ourselves?

How would that change how we interact with friends, strangers, even enemies?

How would we pay attention to our own needs and the needs of others differently?

How would we live differently in relationship to creation and to all the stuff that we possess?

See, I think we have some weird concepts about humility and arrogance in our culture...some misunderstandings. Too often when people feel good about themselves or confident in themselves, we call them arrogant or full of themselves. Too often we ask people to downplay their strengths, to hide their goodness.

And then pair that with all the ways we have to compare ourselves to others, to assume how perfect someone else's life is and to decide how lacking ours is. And, while social media has certainly added to this problem, let's not forget that people were putting a lot of energy into "keeping up with the Joneses" and looking the part long before we were all carrying computers in our pockets.

How would all of this be impacted if we learned to lean into the truth of our belovedness? If we learned to see others as God's beloved children as well?

Friends, we've said it since the beginning of Advent - we live in a weary and a wearying world. It can all be overwhelming. But, perhaps, when we trust our own belovedness...when we live with confidence that we belong here with all the commitments we hold to love and peace, to justice and compassion, to truth and grace, to hope and joy...when we live bravely in this world as God's beloved children, we can make a difference.

One last time, as we finish up this series, I want you to hear the poem by Rev. Sarah (Are) Speed written in response to this scripture. It is titled, "The Bravest Thing We Can Do."

"Trust your belovedness.

Let it be a protest,

an act of resistance,

a song of celebration.

Trust your belovedness in a world

that is rarely satisfied.

Wear it like a badge of honor.

Speak it as confidently as your last name.

Tattoo it to your heart.

When outside forces

chip away at your sense of self,

when life asks you

to hand over the keys,

remember the water.

Remember creation.

Remember how it was *good*,

*so very good*.

Let that truth hum through your veins.

Sing it so loud

that it drowns out the weariness of the world,

for the bravest thing we can ever do

is trust that we belong here" ("The Bravest Thing We Can Do" by Sarah (Are) Speed, published in *How does a weary world rejoice? An Advent Devotional*, Sanctifiedart.org)

Go ahead, have confidence in God's love for you. Trust in your belovedness. You are God's beloved child. Live as if that is so. Amen.