

The Baptism of Jesus

12 January 2020

Being the Beloved of God, Filling that Donut

Reading: Matthew 3:13-17

Some of you, like me, will have seen over the holidays the interview with Sir Elton John about his life. It was a remarkable interview for his honesty about his struggles and his heartache and especially his battle with addiction to drugs and alcohol. In mid-life he awoke to the fact that he was either going to die from an overdose or turn a corner. So he joined Alcoholics Anonymous. The first of the 12 steps is acknowledging a supreme power and he found this really hard. He had grown up with no spirituality. He knew nothing about God – he simply knew that he had an enormous hole in his life. And he was filling that hole with drugs and alcohol. He learnt a phrase from other addicts, “The donut,” they said, “has a hole in it.” Without God, without a higher purpose, our lives have a hole in them. We all know people who have tried to fill that hole with all the wrong things. It is easy to see that hole in other people's lives but when we are honest we know that hole in our own lives too.

Along with the rest of the worldwide church today we keep the feast of Jesus' baptism. As we will see in a moment, at least I hope you will see in a moment, Jesus baptism is a really important event. When the adult Jesus steps onto the pages of the Gospel he doesn't come with a great fanfare, rather he humbly asks for baptism from John. He is aligning himself with the hope that John the baptizer is offering.

The Spirit descends like a dove as Jesus rises from the water and this hints at the creation story in Genesis 1:2 where the spirit of God hovered over the face of the waters bringing life out of the depths. Now the spirit hovers again, breathing fresh life into the world through Jesus Christ. A work of creation is happening again. Through Jesus' coming ministry the world will be renewed from within.

Fine words but what does this actually mean. The key to unlock this passage is verse 17: “You are my beloved, in whom I am well pleased.”

It's an old word, beloved. We don't often say beloved to one another. But it's a very beautiful word, beloved. Especially when you break it down. It literally means “be” “loved.” God is saying to Jesus, “Be loved”. “Be loved by me. You are the apple of my eye. You are the one I delight in. You give me joy and pleasure and delight.

Something remarkable happened for Jesus that day. Jesus found a deeper assurance of his father's presence through his baptism and this gave him calm, confidence, a calling and meaning for his life. Or, to put it another way, the hole in the donut was filled with God's love.

I wonder if you have ever had the experience of being loved in this way. It is a life defining moment.

Like most young men Sam was very nervous about his bar mitzvah. All his family and friends would be there and, to make matters worse, he had a lot of lines he had to

recite by heart. At a bar mitzvah it is traditional for the parents to say something too, much as we might at a 21st. As his father got up to speak Sam's heart was pounding high up in his chest.

His father cleared his throat. "Sam, Mum and I want you to know that whether you will have success or not, whether you become important or not, whether you are healthy or not, whether you have children or not, we love you. Always remember how much your mother and I love you." Something came over Sam at that point. Up till then he had always believed that he had to earn his parents love by doing well at school or being good at sports or going to the right university. Sam said later it was at that moment he felt truly at peace like he never had before. Because he knew his parents love was not conditional on him being successful or important or healthy. He was loved without condition.

Another young person had a similar experience at a youth camp - like the Easter camp here in Christchurch. There were thousands of kids there and the organisers with the best of intentions had arranged a cross country. Some kids are better at cross country than others. But the man on the loudspeaker called out the name of each teenager as they crossed the line and their place. When the last kid was coming up to the line her friends could see what was about to happen. Rather than let her be named forever as the kid that got last, her friends ran down to the final 100 meters held hands with her and they all crossed the line together. There was no last that day just 20 friends finishing together. Susan the runner said "I felt a connection with other Christians that I had never felt before in my life. It was unconditional love."

Unfortunately most of us struggle for one reason or another to know we are loved.

But what that voice said of Jesus on the day of his baptism God is saying to you today: "You (insert your name here)..... are my beloved. Be loved. In you I delight. You are the apple of my eye. I delight in you. I cherish you. You give me great joy."

We don't have to do anything to earn God's love - it is already given. This is the great message of the Bible - God's unearned but abundant love for each of us. We have a special name for this love. We call it grace.

The point is that God doesn't make junk. God carefully and painstakingly watched over your making. Even in your mother's womb God was carefully crafting you from the very best for the very best.

Through our baptism God has named us as his beloved too. God enjoys us and delights in who we are.

My invitation to you this week is to simply take some time, just you and God. Sit quietly in His presence and be loved.

And this, my friends, is the most important thing you will do all year.