

The Baptism of Jesus

10 January 2021

Reading: Mark 1:4-11

Open our hearts and minds to hear your message of love.

In Jesus' name we ask it. Amen

It is wonderful to be welcoming Beau into the family of God through baptism today. In his baptism he is named as the beloved of God.

Today, along with the worldwide church we also celebrate the baptism of Jesus. Just as Beau is named the beloved of God, so too Jesus was named at his baptism.

In verse 10 we read: “And just as he was coming out of the water, he saw the heaven torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. And a voice came from heaven, “*You are my son, the beloved, with you I am well pleased.*”

For Jesus this is **the** turning point in his life. There can be no doubt in his mind that God loves him. What follows: his caring for the sick and the poor, the preaching of good news, his death and his resurrection all flow from this single moment of knowing he is loved by God. This is why Mark recorded it right at the beginning of his Gospel.

The word *beloved* is an old-fashioned word which we don't use all that often. It is a statement “*You are my beloved.*” But it is also an invitation: be *loved*. God is inviting us today to be like Beau and Jesus, to hear that we are God's beloved, to allow ourselves to **be** loved. If we don't know we are a child of God, we can be like the orphan rice bubble - she had a snap and a crackle but no pop!

Between the years 1854 and 1929, over 200,000 orphans and abandoned children in cities in the east of the United States were put on trains in search of families. Many of the children had lost their parents in epidemics like COVID. Some were from poor immigrant families, some from parents too poor to

support their children, some orphaned from the civil war, and some had parents whose alcohol issues made them incapable of looking after their own children.

But they all needed love. Loaded onto trains in groups of 40 they stopped along the way. They were lined up on the platform like livestock while potential parents asked them questions, checked their health, and even examined their teeth. If they were rejected, they got back on the train for the next stop.

Lee Nailling was one such orphan. He was just eight when he was loaded on the orphan train and he was one very anxious young boy. What was to become of him? More of him later.

As we begin this new year, we are all on a journey to discover our real selves. We need to have our status as the children of God reaffirmed. We need to know again, deep in our hearts that God loves us, cares for us, and is concerned for us. We need to know that we are no longer orphans but children of God.

That is why we have the practice of reaffirming our baptisms. Because we need to be reminded not once, but every day, that we are God's beloved. We need to open ourselves again and again to **be** loved.

Two years ago, in 2019, the wider church started a project called *Vocatio*. Twenty-five young people vowed to pray every day, to bless a neighbour every week, to go to spiritual direction monthly, and to have a 24-hour sabbath rest each week. They also gave money to the church, gathered for meals, and regularly prayed together. This was a group of 18- to 30-year-olds. At the completion of the year Michelle said this; *“This year has been exactly what I was needing. Coming back again and again to the simple elements and rhythms of faith, and pushing into the discomfort I had avoided before, now has changed how I want to continue in my faith. Put simply, I have grown to new depths and new joy.”* The motto of those in the *Vocatio* project was simple: pray, bless, notice, rest.

You would expect young people to be put off by all this commitment, but rather than twenty-five doing it, this last year in 2020, sixty young people did it.

Remember Lee Nailling - well, things got worse before they got better. He was split from his brothers, but finally a tall skinny man and a tiny plump woman took him in. The next morning, they sat down to eat breakfast. As he reached out to eat the plump woman stopped him. *“Not until we have said grace.”* She spoke softly about a Father who was in heaven. Lee had no father, so he liked the idea of a Father in heaven, but he still wanted to run away. Then she said the words he needed to hear. She thanked God for the privilege of having a child of her own. For the first time since he had boarded that train, Lee began to relax. *“These are people that actually want me,”* he said to himself.

After breakfast, they took him for a haircut and to each of the houses in the town - all six of them. *“This is our new son,”* they said to everyone in town. This was the way it turned out. He never did run away but went on to discover in this little family all the love and care he could ever wish for.

The journey that Lee made, we all make this year. God is holding it out to you. It is a journey to discover that we are the children of God. We are loved and cared for not because we can fast or give money to the poor or pray early in the morning. We are loved and cared for because God wants us. Nothing more, nothing more complicated. All our efforts might help us, but we don't need to win God's affection. Our adoption is irreversible, and our God delights in us. We are no longer on a train to nowhere. We have come home.

Today God has a message for you. It is the same one spoken over Beau, and Jesus, and Lee Nailling: *“You are my beloved child in whom I delight.”*

Be loved!