

The Baptism of Jesus - knowing we are the beloved of God 9 January 2022

Reading: Luke 3:15-17, 21-22

*Loving God,
Open the Bible to us in a fresh and exciting way.
In Jesus' name. Amen*

And a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the beloved with whom I am well pleased."

Today along with the rest of God's church we keep the baptism of Jesus. The bit I want to focus on is the remarkable statement spoken by God to Jesus at his baptism. "You are my beloved with whom I am well pleased."

Most of us find it difficult to believe that we are God's beloved.

Like most young men Sam was very nervous about his bar mitzvah. He was nervous about the lines he needed to recite in Hebrew but also, he was nervous about what his father might say in his speech. A bar mitzvah is the becoming of an adult (for a Jew). But he needn't have worried. His father got to his feet and said, "Sam whether you have success or not, become important or not, are healthy or not, always remember how much your mother and I love you." This was a transformative moment for Sam. Up till that point he had always thought that his parents' love for him depended on him, on his being successful, or getting the right grades, or behaving himself, or in the future getting a good job, or a good wife. But his father's speech made him realise that his parents' love was not conditional on him being successful or important or healthy. He was loved without condition.

Many others of us also find it hard to believe that we are loved unconditionally by God. It might be that we have in our heads unhelpful self-talk, most of us do. I'm too short or too tall, I'm too skinny or too fat, I'm too dumb or too slow, or too old or too poor.

The annual remembrance of Jesus' baptism is an opportunity for us to hear those words first spoken over Jesus at his baptism as words directed at us. "**You** ... are my beloved with whom I am well pleased." That word beloved is an old-fashioned word, but it is a beautiful word. It is also an invitation. Be loved. Open yourself today to being loved by God.

One of my favourite authors, Henri Nouwen, in his book *Life of the Beloved* writes: "Self-rejection is the greatest enemy of the spiritual life because it contradicts the sacred voice, the voice of God saying to us you are the beloved. Being beloved of God is the very core truth of our existence."

There is so much that can stand in the way of us hearing the voice of God saying: **You** are my beloved. It's almost as if we believe the lie that when God made us, he made junk.

My father's only new car was a 1971 Ford Cortina. He had borrowed up to his arm pits to buy it. It came with that new car smell and even had plastic covering on the seats. It had a button that when you pushed it squirted water onto the windscreen. I had so much fun with that button waiting till the neighbour's cat would come and sit on the warm bonnet and then squirting it. Anyway, the car was junk. They say some cars are made on Mondays when the workers have had a heavy weekend, and some cars are made on Fridays when they are getting ready to go home. This one was started first thing Monday rolled to one side and then finished on Friday afternoon. Everything imaginable went wrong with it. In the end it was towed to the local garage in disgrace, sold and replaced with a Morris Marina.

The point of my story is that we are not Mark 3 Ford Cortinas. God does NOT 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.

This time of year, many undertake diets and fitness programmes. And it's good to take care of our bodies. But so much more depends on a healthy self-image. If we believe that we are the beloved of God, then we will only want the best for our bodies.

In relationships sometimes it can be hard to know we are truly loved. It may be that we want more from others than they are able to give. If we truly know that we are the beloved of God, then we can stop expecting too much from others and draw our sense of wellbeing not from others who are wont to let us down, but from God, the true source of all love.

Nouwen puts it this way, "Many of us spend our lives in ever decreasing small circles looking for someone else or something else to confirm we are loved. When what we really need to know is that we are the beloved of God."

The kick start to Jesus' ministry and his true sense of who he is, was in his baptism and in those words, "You are my beloved." It was knowing that he was truly delighted in. It was not God saying he was doing a good job, but rather it was God saying God delighted in him, enjoyed him. God loved him so much that when he saw him, he wanted to say "Whoopee!"

Through our baptism God has named us as his beloved too. God enjoys us and delights in who we are. If God delights in us, who are we to rubbish what God has made and truly delights in?

When we were baptised whether as a child or an adult, the priest made the sign of the cross on our foreheads. This week I invite you, when you when you wake up each morning, to make the sign of the cross on your forehead with your thumb and say, "I am the beloved of God. I am the beloved of God." And be loved.