

Epiphany C-The Baptism of Our Lord

January 7, 2007

Luke 3: 15-17, 21-22

Title: Beloved

There is a definition of Holy Baptism in ELW on page 225 which reads:

In Holy Baptism the Triune God delivers us from the forces of evil,
Puts our sinful self to death, gives us new birth, adopts us as children
And makes us members of the body of Christ, the Church.

Grace to you from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ in whom
we are baptized by the power of the Spirit!

Miroslav Volf concludes his book *Free of Charge*, a book about giving and
forgiving, in conversation with someone who doesn't believe in God. Here is
a sample:

"I don't believe in God."

"But you do like the God who gives and forgives, as an image, a vision,
right?"

"It's a pretty good god as gods go, the only trouble being that I can't
believe."

"You don't need to believe before you embark on this way of life"

"What? I thought everything in that way of life depended on God. God gives
and forgives, and so should we. God gives and forgives—and so can
we... Take God away and everything collapses. I got this right, didn't I?"

"You did. Everything does depend on God... It depends on God's
presence in our life. And God is present to us whether we believe or
not."

"How inconsiderate of God. Doesn't God know anything about
privacy?"

"God has an excuse. God didn't grow up in an upper-middle class
family with a bedroom of his own... Seriously, try not to think of it
as being disrespectful of your wishes but as being kind—like a lover
who doesn't give up on the beloved... but keeps sending a rose, a
poem, a note."

It's Epiphany. God doesn't give up on this world. Sends His rose Jesus,

His very presence in this world. Present in the board room as much as in the sanctuary room.

Present in the home room as much as in the Sunday School room.
Present in the bedroom as much as in the living room.
There in the entertainment room as much as in the home altar room.

Last Sunday Lake Superior State University in Michigan released it's annual "List of Words and Phrases Banished from the Queen's English for Mis-Use, Over-use and General Uselessness." Here's a sampling from their list:

Went missing/truthiness/now playing in theatres/we're pregnant

In light of the Epiphany of our Lord there are words we should banish from the Christian lexicon. Words which do apply:
alone/lost/absent/forelorned/afraid.

To behold the immanence of
Christ our Lord, to live with such a claim of intimacy, nearness
Can only drive us to one conclusion

We are not alone therefore we are not lost, therefore we can
Face our fears---therefore we are loved, beloved
Martin Luther defined God this way:
"God is nothing but burning love and a glowing oven full
of love."

I recommend seeing the movie We Are Marshall. Depicted there without sentiment or sap, is the community of Marshall University in 1970 coming to terms with it's grief over the tragic plane crash killing all but four football players and one assistant coach.

Talk about being alone, lost, absent, forelorned, afraid.
When the next season comes and the opening game is a disaster,
And it rips wider into the hearts of the survivors, the new coach
Who embodies a persistent presence tells the dejected
Surviving assistant coach "We're not hear to win this season.
This season is about our just trying to make it. It we do that,
We've done something.

That coach embodied the presence of Christ Jesus for those players and coaches.

After he was baptized while in prayer the Holy Spirit comes upon Jesus and a voice from heaven calls out YOU ARE MY SON, THE BELOVED, WITH YOU I AM WELL PLEASED.

The Beloved who gives life. We see the Beloved caring for those raked with pain and possessed of demons. The Beloved touched those nobody else would touch. The Beloved feeds the hungry and eats with those who never get invited.

The Beloved confronts those who lives are death dealing more Interested in their own purity, than in spreading joy and beloved.

Jack Huss resides at Springmoor Health Care Center. He has a passion –working jigsaw puzzles. One day I counted the numbers of puzzles which fill three bookcases—100 puzzles. Jack has completed them all. He patiently puts them together. “Pastor, I’ve got all the time in the world!”

How satisfying that must be. To witness a completed puzzle.
Wouldn’t it be great if many of life’s puzzles were completed.

To look at the puzzling map of the world and to see
In such places as Iraq the end of war, insurgency.
So people can live together in peace.

And some of us have lived with issues keeping us puzzled or leave incomplete the picture we wanted to piece together—an unresponsive Teenager, an unsatisfying job, an unresolved relationship.

Whether or not we can make sense of our lives,
Whether or not we can piece it all together,
One has come among us who does---
Jesus, the beloved, the puzzle complete!

His life, His death, His resurrection. His story makes sense of ours,
His life gives direction to ours, His death/resurrection reclaims our
Broken and damaged puzzle pieces.

We are baptized into the beloved. Beloved we are.

Lost and found

Dirty and now washed clean

Dead and now alive.

Which is the real me? We may not feel clean, alive, purposeful.

But how dare we turn the gold of our Lord into lead.

“I have called you by name, you are mine....you are precious in my Sight.”

Wednesday night while the Shepherd Children’s choir led by Ann Buff and Rich Houze rehearsed I watched two younger siblings run around our sanctuary.

Olivia Sager and Katie Davidson. All you could see were the tops of their heads, bouncing among the pews.

It was a beautiful sight. I wish you’d have been here to witness the Sheer delight of those two in this largely dark place bouncing freely
Here and there, giggling...occasionally pausing to lay down
On the pew.

It’s fair to say that there’s something fundamental, something Basic to knowing that you are loved, beloved which breeds that
Kind of behavior.

Those two in a sense represent all of us---the beloved are free
To be...in the security of the beloved one we
Can so live.

So when God places before us such experiences like becoming a Stephen Minister or giving ourselves to go to Costa Rica and visit our brothers and sisters there, or to dive into supporting the visit from Mnene Parish----we in a sense are living like those two girls....Free to embrace life!

We don’t know what tomorrow brings, but The Beloved is with us.

And we are precious in His sight and our work is not done until all know they are precious. Amen.