

Matthew 3:13-17- Baptism

2020 Jan 12

Prayer: May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable you O God, our strength and our redeemer. Amen.

The other night Isaac, my oldest son and I were watching the Raptor's play basketball. Isaac is a fan of the Golden State Warriors but they are rather awful this year, mostly due to injury – Steph Curry is out and Clay Thompson is down too. Not much to watch in terms of the Warrior however the Raptor's, after their Championship win are now interesting. Isaac is keen to watch their games - I enjoy watching the games with him – mostly because it is something Isaac and I can do together.

The other night Isaac and I were watching the Raptor's play and one of players took to the free throw line and I was amazed at the number and the size of his many tattoos. One tattoo was particularly visible – a profile picture of a “Jesus like figure” with a crown of thorns upon his head. I commented to Isaac that I thought that was one big tattoo and for a young man he seemed to have so many of them. Isaac said; “yeah, he is no longer a rookie.” Now a rookie is a first- or second-year player and so I asked Isaac what the tattoos had to do with being a rookie. Isaac explained that for, “the first year or two you come in rather clean but then you make a load of money and you have all this time on your hands; so you start getting tattoos. It's kind of a mark of your success.” “Good grief”, I replied, “wouldn't it be less painful to just buy some fancy cloths. //

I could almost hear his eyes role.

This week I read about a pastor who found himself in a similar situation, but he was much more wise then I. He was watching NFL football with his twin sons - who had noticed tattoos on the players. As they chatted about the markings the pastor opened up a wonderful conversation with them about the stories behind those tattoos. And he is right - often those with tattoos have wonderful stories to go with them.

One colleague of mine has a beautiful tattoo over her heart that I noticed one summer when she was wearing a sundress. When I asked her about it she told me that the tattoo reminded her of her daughter who had died - the tattoo reminded her of her daughter's smile and all the love she brought to the world.

The waitress in one of the restaurants where I go to at lunch sometimes has words of wisdom tattooed on her forearm and I asked her about those words one day – she told me that she going through a very rough time and she needed; “a constant reminder of how she wanted to live her life - the verse helps me every day live better” she tells me.

I love the stories that come when you ask someone about their tattoos.

So back to the wise pastor and father, he went on to use this conversation about tattoos and their stories with his boys as an opportunity to remind them of their baptisms and of God's story in their lives through their baptisms. He said to them, “We have our own tattoos, you know. You are marked – marked with the waters of baptism -forever.”
//

And you know I think the pastor is right we are marked by those waters and that mark tells a wonderful story, that we don't tell often enough. For many of us Baptism happened long before we were even capable of remembering much. But it is such an important moment – a moment that marks our lives in a significant way.

Every year at this time we hear the story of the Baptism of Jesus. Every year we hear again that when Jesus had been baptized and the Spirit of God descended upon him like a dove, a voice from heaven said, "This is my son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased."

"Beloved." What a beautiful word. To be **beloved** is to be adored. To be beloved is to be cherished, to be treasured.

This is the promise in our baptism as well. Our Baptism is an act of God--God claiming us as God's very own--a *beloved* child--and then God declaring to us--*simply because we belong to God*--that God is well pleased with us.

Now that is a story beautiful to tell – a story to hear again and again to share over and over. We are beloved by God and God is pleased with us. With you and with me. Now this is not to say that those who are not baptized are not beloved – I believe we are all beloved - but for those of us that are baptized we carry a mark that is important to us and we carry Jesus Baptism story in a distinct way.

The story of Jesus baptism, the story of our baptism, the story of each of us being beloved - is a story to share over and over again because that is not always the story we tell ourselves.

Many of us have another story that runs in our head. Sometimes we call this storyteller the inner critic, that one who reminds us just what a failure we are or how people may only be pretending to like us; but if they really knew us, they would run away, or how we are not attractive enough or talented enough or clever enough or intelligent enough to be beloved--much less have someone be pleased with us.

Life can hold with it joy and laughter and wonderful conversations and friendships, some close enough even to be our chosen families. And right alongside it, life can bring with it loss and disappointment and sleepless nights and an inner certainty that no matter what we do or no matter how hard we try, we're just not measuring up.

Which is why we need to tell this baptism story over and over again – Jesus' and our own - to counter the story of the inner critic--to counter the story the world often tells that to be truly beloved you have to possess something: money, house, good looks or power. We tell this baptism story over and over to counter the story that we don't measure up or that we don't belong.//

The story of baptism is not only a story that we belong to God and are beloved by God; it is a story that we belong to each other, that we are a part of a larger story – the story of God's presence in the world.////

Just after Christmas some friends and I went to see the movie; "Little Women" a Hollywood adaptation of the classic book written by Louisa May Alcott. I think it is a beautiful story about how we all belong to each other not only as family but beyond - we belong to each other in community. What I found interesting about the movie was, that though the **book** is clear that the Father of the household is away from home because he is a chaplain - an army chaplain and it made clear in the book that the little family is a family of faith – a family that follows the way of Jesus – it is in fact the reason the girls

are challenged to care for a very poor family at significant cost to themselves. The movie leaves this connection to faith out. Why does Hollywood leave out the very motivation for the generous, and difficult choices this family makes? I guess families motivated to act with compassion and generosity because they follow the way of Jesus is not appealing in this day and age. Perhaps it has something to do with having a President in the United States who seems to be blindly supported by the Christian right and people see the lies and the total disregard for human life and arrogance and all this has left a bad taste in their mouth for all things Christian. This makes me excruciatingly sad but I refuse to be embraced or to hide that which marks my life. ///

In this day and age I think it is so very important that we tell the story of that which marks us for life – that which moves us, and motivates us. It means something and it brings me here to this place.

We come together in worship because we need to hear over and over again that God loves us and has claimed us as beloved children, cherished and treasured. We come together in worship because our wells sometimes have run dry and we need to feel those refreshing waters of baptism trickling over us again. Because sometimes life is just so hard we have no words to pray or no songs to sing; we are just empty. Sometimes it's the community of faith, that sings those hymns we can't always sing, and sometimes it's the community that prays the prayers we can't always pray, and sometimes it's the community that speaks the words of faith that we can have trouble speaking ourselves or even believing ourselves. And we just let those words and songs and prayers wash over us, reminding us of God's love, reminding us that in the waters of baptism, and in many other ways God has called us and claimed us as God's own—beloved.

We have been marked forever by our God of abundant love. And as such we have a story worth living.

This morning there is water in the font and before you leave if you would like to come to the baptismal bowl and dip you fingers in the water and remember your baptism I invite you to do so.

If you have not been baptized, then I invite you to come also to the font, dip your fingers in the water and think about how the knowledge that you are beloved of God marks your life.

I think the Raptors play the Spurs tonight. I'm going to watch for the Raptor player with the interesting tattoos and maybe - I will remind Isaac of the day we brought him to the front of the church – poured water into the font and marked him forever in baptism - So that he might be marked and reminded that he is beloved of God - always.

Amen

Matthew 3:13-17

¹³Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan, to be baptized by him. ¹⁴John would have prevented him, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?" ¹⁵But Jesus answered him, "Let it be so now; for it is proper for us in this way to fulfill all righteousness." Then he consented. ¹⁶And when Jesus had been baptized, just

as he came up from the water, suddenly the heavens were opened to him and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him. ¹⁷And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased."

Rev Debra Berg