

Beloved: Called and Sent

By: Meagan McLaughlin

January 15, 2023. Today we celebrate the baptism of Jesus. We remember Peter's claim that God shows no partiality, and in her sermon Pastor Meagan reminds us to listen for God's voice calling us, and all people, beloved.

Readings: [Isaiah 42:1-9](#), [Acts 10:34-43](#), [Matthew 3:13-17](#)

*** Transcript ***

After telling us about John's ministry, which John saw as preparing the way for Jesus, in today's passage Jesus himself comes back on the scene, as we heard in our gospel. He's a grown man about 30 years old, and he's ready to enter into public ministry. And the first thing that Jesus, the Son of God, does is join the crowds of people who present themselves to John for baptism.

John has made it clear to his followers that he is not the Messiah, and that the one to come — Jesus — is so much more powerful than John that John is not fit to untie his sandal straps. And yet Jesus comes to John to be baptized. And by doing this Jesus is placing himself in the midst of all the other people coming to John to offer and commit their lives to God. Jesus is demonstrating his humanity, and his need to be in intentional relationship with God, who he called Father at the age of 12.

And then, as Jesus is praying to God his Father after being baptized, God shows up in a concrete way. The Holy Spirit descends in the form of a dove, a visual sign of God's presence and blessing. And the voice of God is heard calling Jesus his beloved son. And just like that, Jesus goes from one of the crowd, to being called out as beloved child of God!

Jesus' baptism is significant because of what it reveals to us about Jesus' identity as human and divine. We read this today and know that not only does Jesus call God Father, but God claims Jesus as beloved son. This event also reminds us who we are, and when we hear it, we're called to remember that we too are God's beloved children. In Isaiah today, God calls God's people by name, takes them by the hand, and claims them as their own. We are God's own. And God promises that even when we are walking through fire, and flood water, God is with us and will never forsake us. We are each called by name, and God claims each one of us as his own.

And, there's more. In Isaiah, and in Matthew's telling of Jesus' baptism, the promise is not only to each of us as individuals, but to all of us, as God's people. God claims us as people of God. Jesus is one of hundreds, thousands perhaps, coming before God to be baptized. And Isaiah tells us God will bring together all of God's people, from every corner of the earth.

The promise of God knows no limits, no boundaries or borders, no nation or race or language, from here to the ends of the earth. Today we heard about Christianity in Africa from Marc Horn in Adult Forum. There is no limits, boundaries, or borders, from here to the ends of the earth, for God's love. The Apostles Peter and John understand this. When they hear that the Samaritans — people seen as second class, outsiders, foreigners — have been baptized, they immediately go to them as leaders of the fledgling church to welcome them and affirm their place as children of God. And the Samaritans too receive the Holy Spirit.

We remember our baptisms today, and as we do, we remember who we are as children of God. This is

not something we earn. It is a gift of God freely given to us in grace. The Israelites were far from perfect — they knew they had made mistakes and failed God as a people, and they knew they needed his forgiveness and mercy. All of those coming to John likewise knew that they had sinned and needed God's forgiveness and blessing in their lives. And as Luther tells us, we are both sinner and saint, and God claims us as God's own with no conditions or requirements or exceptions.

Celebrating the baptism of Jesus, remembering Peter's claim that God shows no partiality, hearing the echoes of Isaiah's words to the Israelites, reminds us to listen for God's voice calling us, and all people, beloved. We are reminded that not only can we not earn our place as God's child, but because of God's grace, we don't have to earn it. When we're tempted to try to decide who is worthy and who is not, whether we're worthy or we're not, who is in and who is out, whether we're in or we're out, we should hear these words and be reminded. We are invited and challenged to claim the promise of God for ourselves, and for our community at Christ Lutheran, and for our neighboring churches on Lockwood and the ELCA congregations within our conference, and for the church in Africa, and all countries around the world, all peoples, from one end of the earth to the other.

We're called to remember that we are not beloved because we are baptized, but we baptize because we are beloved. We're not part of God's family because we're baptized, but we baptize because we are part of God's family. And when we come together at the font, at the table, God is with us, calling us by name, calling us beloved.

Thanks be to God.

*** Keywords ***

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