

You Are My Beloved

Luke 3:15-7;21-23

As the people were filled with expectation, and all were questioning in their hearts concerning John, whether he might be the Messiah, John answered all of them by saying, "I baptize you with water; but one who is more powerful than I is coming; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand, to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his granary; but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire." Now when all the people were baptized, and when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, the heaven was opened, and the Holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased."

Let's pray, Loving God, may the words of my mouth and the meditation of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, oh Lord, our strength, and our redeemer. Amen and Go Hawks! What is the score? I know somebody knows.

Last Sunday we had an incredibly moving worship service. If you missed it, go online and see what you missed. There was baptism and communion. I was particularly moved by the professions of faith from Tracy and Steve. I hope others who have not been baptized will consider taking the plunge so to speak, and give your testimony, and share your commitment to follow Jesus and have him at the center of your life.

Now, in our text this morning, Jesus is about to begin his ministry. For Jesus the ritual of being baptized was important before he delved into his life giving work. This makes perfect sense, for when we are about to do something really big in our lives we have rituals too. We have baby showers, and wedding showers. We go on retreats, have silent meditations, and at times we fast from eating as a means of getting spiritually ready for what lies ahead. Well for Jesus, he began his public ministry by first being baptized and then he went to the wilderness for alone time with God.

John was related of Jesus, perhaps a cousin. A few weeks ago during Advent, we talked about Mary and Elizabeth, the mothers of Jesus and John. We mentioned how they got together during their pregnancies to celebrate the miraculous work of God in their lives. Before either was born, the angel told Elizabeth that John would be the prophet of the Most High God and the angel told Mary that Jesus would be the Son of God.

Well John and Jesus grew up, and in the gospels, John the Baptist preached repentance and admonished his followers to turn from sin and wickedness and follow the ways of God. John embodied the words of the prophet Isaiah when he preached:

"The voice of one crying out in the wilderness,
'Prepare the way of the Lord,

make his paths straight.
Every valley shall be filled,
and every mountain and hill shall be made low,
and the crooked shall be made straight,
and the rough ways made smooth;
and all flesh shall see the salvation of God. ”

John knew he was not the Messiah, but one who was to prepare the way for the Messiah—Jesus. In the vernacular, we could say John stayed in his lane. Amen. People asked him if he was the messiah, the one they were waiting for. It would have been easy for John to get the big head and say, yep, I'm the one you're looking for. I'm your guy. But he didn't do that. John knew his call and purpose. Many of us get into trouble when we try to do things we are not called to do nor gifted to do.

John said I'm not worthy to untie the sandals of the coming one. In that era, only the lowest servants untied their master's sandals. John said, I baptize with water, but the one we are looking for will baptize with the Holy Spirit and with fire. Although Jesus would baptize and bring God's presence, there would also be an element of fire and judgement. Like John, Jesus would also call the world to repent.

John mentions a winnowing fork of which I imagine none of us have any experience. It was a fork like instrument used to toss grain after it was harvested. While the grain was tossed in the air, the wind would separate the chaff, the inedible parts from the valued grain. So while Jesus ushered in God's spirit, God's wind, God's breath, there is also an element of judgement and separation.

So Jesus went to John to be baptized. Jesus' baptism symbolized the end of John's important work and the beginning of Jesus' ministry that led to salvation. Jesus went down into the water, not because he needed to repent, but to symbolize a new beginning of God's work. In baptism Jesus was commissioned and empowered to do the work of salvation.

Then the scriptures have these few words that are often overlook, *and when Jesus also had been baptized **and was praying...*** And, was praying.

Jesus prayed a lot in the gospels. When Jesus got away, he prayed. When he went into the wilderness to prepare for his ministry, he prayed. Before calling his disciples he prayed. At the transfiguration when Moses and Elijah appeared, Jesus prayed. Before Jesus' death on the cross, he prayed.

It might do us well to spend more time in prayer before we start any project or make any important decisions. We too can listen for God's voice and God's direction. If we spent more time in prayer, we would understand that we serve a God of compassion and justice, not a God of fear. If we spent more time in prayer, we would have less anxiety

over people who are different from us. If we spent more time in prayer, we would know people are more important than things. If we spent more time in prayer, we would know that God can do anything but fail. Amen

And in that sacred moment of prayer, the physical manifestation of the Holy Spirit descended upon Jesus.

Prayer changes things my sisters and brothers. There is a saying in some circles—little prayer, little power, much prayer, much power, no prayer, no power. This power is not physical power as in military might or power over other people, but a spiritual fortitude to stand in the midst of everyday challenges; challenges of addiction, physical illness, relationship issues, even personal financial crisis. Prayer changes things. And, if the situation you are facing doesn't change, God will change you.

When the Holy Spirit descended upon Jesus, a voice was heard saying, you are my beloved. With you, I am well pleased. Wow! All of us love being recognized for being special. Jesus was God's beloved son. And because of Jesus, we are all God's beloved children too. Although, we don't always behave like we are sons and daughters of the most high God. Because Jesus gave his life for all of us, we have been adopted into the family of God. So we too can listen for those words, ***you are my beloved.***

When we are baptized in Jesus' name and when we experience the presence of God and the Holy Spirit, there is a sweet presence of God that surrounds us. We feel it when we are together in worship and we feel it in those quiet personal moments we have with God. You are God's beloved. No matter what happens the rest of the day—whether the Seahawks win or lose; no matter what happens during the week, you belong to God.

You are God's beloved. Indeed there is sweet sweet spirit in this place. Let us stand and sing our closing hymn #293 There's a Sweet, Sweet Spirit.