

Remember Your Roots and Your Baptism

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Luke 3:21-38

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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."

The Ancestors of Jesus

Jesus was about thirty years old when he began his work. He was the son (as was thought) of Joseph son of Heli, son of Matthat, son of Levi, son of Melchi, son of Jannai, son of Joseph, son of Mattathias, son of Amos, son of Nahum, son of Esli, son of Naggai, son of Maath, son of Mattathias, son of Semein, son of Josech, son of Joda, son of Joanan, son of Rhesa, son of Zerubbabel, son of Shealtiel, son of Neri, son of Melchi, son of Addi, son of Cosam, son of Elmadam, son of Er, son of Joshua, son of Eliezer, son of Jorim, son of Matthat, son of Levi, son of Simeon, son of Judah, son of Joseph, son of Jonam, son of Eliakim, son of Melea, son of Menna, son of Mattatha, son of Nathan, son of David, son of Jesse, son of Obed, son of Boaz, son of Sala, son of Nahshon, son of Amminadab, son of Admin, son of Arni, son of Hezron, son of Perez, son of Judah, son of Jacob, son of Isaac, son of Abraham, son of Terah, son of Nahor, son of Serug, son of Reu, son of Peleg, son of Eber, son of Shelah, son of Cainan, son of Arphaxad, son of Shem, son of Noah, son of Lamech, son of Methuselah, son of Enoch, son of Jared, son of Mahalaleel, son of Cainan, son of Enos, son of Seth, son of Adam, son of God.

Thank you, Pastor Anita, for reading that challenging scripture. This text is one of my favorites in the Christian scriptures. I love the rhythm. I love the flow, and I love that Jesus' ancestral line is rooted with God. The genealogy in Matthew's gospel ends with Abraham. That was important for the

audience Mathew was addressing. Luke went farther with his genealogy to include 77 generations—all the way back to the Source of all creation. Luke begins his genealogy with Joseph and ends his human genealogy with Adam, but the most important one in this genealogy is God. Jesus was the son of God. Jesus was the Holy One's beloved and begotten child.

Now, I will admit as Dr. Gafney does in the lectionary for Year W, that I am a bit disappointed in Luke who does not name any women in his genealogy. We know who really gave birth to Jesus and all those generations of men. It was the women, who are glaringly silent here. Yet, we know that the God of the universe is not a man, is not male, and is beyond gender. That should be easy for us to understand in our gender fluid world. But again, what really speaks to me in this genealogy is the origin of the human family. Knowing where we come from is important psychologically, spiritually, and often medically.

Those of you who were around in the late 1970's remember the acclaimed television series *Roots* that was based on the novel *Roots* by Alex Haley. It was a groundbreaking mini-series. The television show depicted the ancestral line of a slave taken from West Africa named Kunta Kente. This fictional story recounted his family history through slavery, the antebellum period, and ending with the Civil War.

Today we have the television show, *Finding Your Roots*, with Henry Louis Gates, Jr. This show traces not just Black people's ancestry but Euro-Americans and other ethnic Americans as well. Dr. Gates finds fascinating facts and legacies going back 4, 5, and 6 generations.

Yes, knowing our roots is big business these days. And if you are the DIY type and into exploring your family's past, we have [ancestry.com](https://www.ancestry.com). Some people have found relatives all over the world with just a few clicks of a mouse. I haven't gotten much into Ancestry.com, but I did find out that 87%

of my DNA matches the DNA of those from west Africa. And 13% matches the DNA of those from England, Ireland, Wales, Germany, Sweden, or Denmark. I'm sure there is a story there and I would love to uncover it someday.

The scripture genealogies fascinate me because I lose my ancestral roots after going back 3 generations. Jesus' roots go way back. All the way back to God. Truth is that all our roots go back that far. We may not know the 70+ generations in between, but if we could go back to the beginning of our family tree, all our roots would begin with God. We are created and fashioned in the perfect image of God. In all of us resides the breath and the DNA of the Holy One.

One of the things I like about the show Finding Our Roots, is that through the ancestral search, the person being interviewed is able to give new meaning to some part of their character. Part of the reason we are who we are today, and why we act the way we do, can be attributed to our upbringing, our personal choices and attributed to the character of our ancestors.

When some of us were younger and we wanted to go out with our friends, our parents would ask, who are their people? My parents decided whether I could go out with my friends, based on who were their parents. The parents' character impacted whether I could hang out with their kids. My parents believed the proverb, the apple never falls far from the tree.

If that is the case, then in all our DNA we carry the character of God, the Divine. So what might that character look like? Well, there is unconditional *love*. There is passion for *justice* and the quest for *right relationships* among God's beloved ones. There is the character of *forgiveness*, not just once or twice, but Jesus said 70 times 7.

There is the Divine character of *hope*. God believes in us and knows that we can do more than we ever hoped for or imagined. So our character is also one that includes hope. We believe in one another even when we have been disappointed time and time again. We hope for a better tomorrow.

In the beginning of our text, Jesus was with those dedicating themselves to live more godly and striving for a better tomorrow. Those being baptized were turning away from their old way of being in the world and pledging to cultivate more of their godly DNA. And Jesus was right there in the midst of them.

Pastoral Theologian, Robert M. Brearly wrote in *Feasting on the Word* that,

Jesus simply got in line with everyone who had been broken by the “wear and tear” of this selfish world and had all but given up on themselves and their God... When the line of downtrodden and sin-sick people formed in hopes of new beginnings through a return to God, Jesus joined them. At his baptism, Jesus identified with the damaged and broken people who needed God.

Jesus also felt he needed to be baptized by John as he began his formal ministry. Jesus' baptism was not so much about sin and repentance but about committing his life to following a new path of speaking truth to power, of healing, and sacrificial love. This ritual of baptism that symbolized a new beginning and a commitment to God's way made sense to Jesus. So he went to the end of the baptismal line and waited his turn. Jesus wasn't baptized in isolation but in community.

Rituals are important when we start something new. Rituals are important at all important milestones in our lives. Births, deaths, marriage, divorce, recovery, healings, and yes even retirement. Rituals are important markers in our lives. Here Jesus' baptism was a sign of a new direction in his life. A new

direction we now know was not pretty at the end, nevertheless a path he was called to walk.

My friends, we are baptized into community—a community of people committed to following the way of Jesus. That way of Jesus is hard sometimes. We are not baptized into a life of ease, of rainbows and pretty flowers. We are baptized into a community of people who also are willing to speak truth to power and to offer healing and forgiveness.

When it was Jesus' turn to be baptized, John lowered him in the water, brought him up, and then they all prayed. In that time of prayer, the voice of God was heard saying, you are my son, you are my beloved one. In you, I am well pleased. One of the special greetings of Pastor Tim's is, *beloved one*. When I hear those words, I am reminded that yes, I too am God's beloved one.

Every child of God needs to hear, you are my beloved one and with you I am well pleased. When Jesus heard these words, you are my beloved, it changed his life forever. These words are powerful and will also change the lives of our children, our neighbors, our spouses, those living on the street and those estranged from families. You are my beloved one. If we were convinced, we were well loved, some of us would make different choices. We would choose love over jealousy; compassion over competition; and hope over despair.

The community prayed after their baptism and then they got busy. My friends, the *work* of our baptism comes once we get out of the water. The ritual is great. The ritual of baptism is important, and I encourage those who haven't been baptized to consider doing so. Pastor Anita and I would love to talk with you about being baptized. But the *work* of being God's beloved isn't in the baptism. It's what we do when we get out of the water. Somebody say, Amen.

When Jesus got out of the water, he went to the wilderness for a time of preparation and prayer before he began his sacred work. It was there in the wilderness that he was tempted to turn away from his divine purpose and calling. Immediately after the water, Jesus in all his humanity was challenged to throw away his divine purpose. Out of the water and into the fire.

Jesus resisted the temptation to turn his back on God and take the easy way out. Instead, he leaned into the tough ministry of healing, of sharing love with those who were rejected, of reinterpreting the sacred texts, and feeding bodies and souls of hungry, thirsty people.

My friends there is a call on each of our lives. Some are called to,

1. Show hospitality
2. Impart wisdom
3. Teach the young ones
4. Bring beauty and encouragement through art
5. Save the planet
6. Keep things light with laughter and humor
7. Show the way to the Holy

Our baptism is our sign to the world, that we are now committed to do the work. Going through the water is not the work. The work comes after we wade through the water and dry off. For there will be another baptism we will go through when we do the work. It will feel like a baptism of fire as we do the painful work of justice making, and truth telling. But that baptism of fire is also a baptism of love.

For through it all, God's love and presence will always be with us. And, the good news is, we have one another as we go. The African proverb says, if you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together.

We are together in this thing called life. We are together in this COVID challenge. We are together as we navigate this city of haves and have nots—those with plenty and other living in utter poverty. We are together in this

pastoral transition. We are together as we breathe life into our new governance structure. We are together in the voting rights struggle and the battle to end white supremacy. We are in this thing together.

Yes, there will be bumps along the way. There will be trouble in the water. But wade on anyway my friends. God will guide us to the other side. There's another spiritual that says, walk together children, don't you get weary, there's a great camp meeting in the promise land. Wade through the water beloved. Wade through the water together, we will make it to the other side. Don't stop when the water gets choppy, keep going. God will guide us through.

And all God's people said, amen. Our closing song is *Wade in the Water*. Words are in your bulletin. Please stand as you are able.