

## Baptism of Our Lord C (1/13/2019)

Isaiah 43:1-7

Psalm 29

Acts 8:14-17

**Luke 3:15-17, 21-22**

*God's claim is personal. Although the life of faith is collective, in Holy Baptism God names you individually and favors you distinctly. God is particularly fond of you. And, just as God secures your identity according to God's love, so does God secure the identity of each of God's beloved children. And that's a good place to start.*

Lest we forget that there are four biblical witnesses to the life of Jesus, every once in a while it helps to set them side by side and take note of their commonalities and differences. The four Gospel storytellers have varied perspectives and priorities, and we ought to honor each account for its distinctiveness, even as we celebrate all four as faithful portraits of the one we call Lord. The details that distinguish the Gospels do not diminish but enrich the story, testifying to its relevance in diverse contexts. Inconsistencies, in other words, are not so much a threat to the story's legitimacy as they are narrative wrinkles that lend it character.

So, what about the accounts of Jesus' baptism, the event that we commemorate today? Although Mark, Matthew, and Luke all include similar versions, one difference in particular caught my eye this week. As Jesus emerges from the waters of the Jordan, in Matthew God's famous affirmation is in the demonstrative third person: "This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased." It's a public announcement, a proclamation of Jesus' identity and authority directed to those who might be compelled to follow him. Mark and Luke, however, record these same words in the second person singular: "*You* are my Son, the Beloved; with *you* I am well pleased." In Mark, only Jesus hears the voice; it's a private epiphany, an affirmation intended for him alone. But **in**

**Luke, God's expression of love and approval at Jesus' baptism is a word for him and for all to hear.<sup>1</sup>**

What difference does it make that God's pronouncement in Luke is personal, yet occurs in public? What does it mean that God picks Jesus out of a crowd and says *You, Child, you are the one I love*? Keep in mind that the Father's love does not protect Jesus from hardship. Following his baptism, he's immediately driven out into the wilderness to be tested by evil. Then, he begins his ministry, preaching a prophetic vision of justice, associating with undesirables, confronting the powerful, and inevitably facing death for refusing to concede his conviction that human community is meant for more. God's affirmation at Jesus' baptism isn't a promise of safety and comfort, but an anointing for the trying work of the kingdom. ***You, Jesus, I love you no matter what. So, you don't need to be afraid of what's coming, regardless of how daunting it may be.***

Isn't that the way with the second person singular? **Human life takes place in a crowd, nevertheless we long to be known, to be loved, individually. We long to hear the word "you" spoken earnestly by those we admire and trust – parents and family members, teachers and mentors, partners and friends: *You, you are worthy just as you are, and I care about you.* That kind of genuine affirmation establishes in us an unshakable sense of identity and enables us to act with confidence from that secure center.<sup>2</sup>**

And, that kind of genuine affirmation is precisely what takes place at every baptism. God's capacity to love knows no bounds. It is precisely because Jesus is God's Beloved Child that you can know you are, too. I'm reminded of the insight in William P.

---

<sup>1</sup> See Karoline Lewis, "The Power of 'You,'" <http://www.workingpreacher.org/craft.aspx?post=5273>.

<sup>2</sup> See Ernest Hess, in *Feasting on the Word*, Year C, Vol. 1, 241.

Young's *The Shack* that God is "especially fond" of each of God's dear ones. "Is [Bruce Cockburn] your favorite?" the narrator asks, as Abba serves him breakfast in a shack in the wilderness, a Cockburn tune playing in the background.

"Mackenzie, I have no favorites," she responds, "I am just especially fond of him."

"You seem to be especially fond of a lot of people.... Are there any who you are *not* especially fond of?"

"Nope, I haven't been able to find any. Guess that's jes' the way it is."<sup>3</sup>

**When we come to the font, it's the particular love of God that we each receive: "*You, child of God, you have been sealed by the Holy Spirit and marked with the cross of Christ forever.*" "*We welcome you into the body of Christ and into the mission we share.*"<sup>4</sup>**

And, we offer each other echoes of that "you" every time we return to the community where we first heard it: "In the name of Jesus Christ, I proclaim to *you* that your sins are forgiven and *you* are released."

"The peace of Christ be with *you* always."

"The Lord be with *you*."

"This is my body given for *you*. This cup is the new covenant in my blood, shed for *you*."

"The God of glory dwell in *you* richly, name *you* beloved, and shine brightly on your path; and the blessing of almighty God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, be upon *you* and remain with *you* always."<sup>5</sup>

---

<sup>3</sup> 118-19.

<sup>4</sup> *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*, Assembly Edition, 231.

<sup>5</sup> *Sundays and Seasons*.

When you internalize the notion that God is especially fond of you, it becomes clear that God is also especially fond of others. And, from this perspective, it's possible to look upon another individual, no matter how different, with the dignity that God confers on her. It's possible to say: *You, child of God, regardless of your race, ethnicity, country of origin, ancestry, or culture; you, child of God, regardless of your religious background or lack thereof; you, child of God, regardless of your gender identity or sexual orientation; you, child of God, regardless of your age, marital status, or family structure; you, child of God, regardless of your economic circumstances or living situation; you, child of God, regardless of your political perspective; you, child of God, regardless of your gifts and challenges; you will be honored here.*<sup>6</sup>

**Dear church, God's claim is personal. Although the life of faith is collective, in Holy Baptism God names you individually and favors you distinctly. God is particularly fond of you. And, just as God secures your identity according to God's love, so does God secure the identity of each and every one of God's beloved children. And that's a good place to start.**

---

<sup>6</sup> Statement of Welcome, Peace Lutheran Church, Puyallup, Washington.