

Intro/Summary

“Long lay the world in sin and error pining,
'Till he appeared and the soul felt its worth.
A thrill of hope the weary world rejoices,
For yonder breaks a new and glorious morn;”

These words from O Holy Night were the opening lines of my sermon five weeks ago as we began this worship series on how a weary world might still be able to rejoice. We began with Zechariah's vision in the temple that rendered him mute - recognizing that sometimes our weariness can harden us toward hope. Next, Mary received the surprising news that she was pregnant - and she rushed to be with her cousin Elizabeth. Their connection - their sharing in fear and worry helped set them both free to feel both the joy and the stress of their situations. Then came the surprise naming of John - a break with tradition that signified the gift of this child for more than just his family. We explored the need to practice curiosity and wonder in our lives - especially when we encounter the unexpected. We sang songs and told stories of hope for a world about to turn with Mary and Zechariah. And we created room and welcome for God and each other to come. We met Simeon and Anna - who reminded us of the rituals that keep us tied to the people and places where we may experience love, joy, connection, peace, wonder, and God.

And today see how these interwoven birth stories of John and Jesus move into adulthood and ministry...hoping in this weary world for our souls to feel their worth.

The Bible Story

Our scripture reading this morning assumes we know that John has begun his ministry - drawing crowds of people to hear God's good news - and challenging them to repent - to turn their thinking and their living around. He has been baptizing them -so many in fact that he has drawn the negative attention of King Herod. And is arrested.

It is one more way in which this story of God coming to be with humanity in Jesus, unfolds in the midst of difficulty and weariness - pain and fear.

But presumably before the arrest - because the scripture says that as many were being baptized - Jesus was also baptized. Joining the crowd in the water with John.

And in that moment - the scripture says Jesus was praying and that heaven was opened up and that God declared to him - you are my precious child. I am so proud of you. And I love you. You are my beloved.

It's a scene that reminds me of Zechariah's prophecy that we heard several weeks ago - where Zechariah takes his child John in his arms and says, You child, will be a prophet of the most high.

In this moment of baptism, it is like God also is taking his child in his arms and speaking tenderly to tell him who he is. Even Jesus needed to hear...

You are precious and beloved.

This is Jesus' foundation as he is sent off into ministry - as he steps into a life that will be difficult and beautiful, wearying and empowering, hopeful and despairing, full of life and also of death. God tells Jesus who Jesus is - he is precious and beloved.

Messages

We live in a time and a culture where that is not always the foundation from which we start. Capitalism and Consumerism need us to believe we are not enough or are in need of improvement in order to thrive. Pain and tragedy can give us a flawed negative view of self. Competition or even just the way we are put together - can make us view ourselves as less than or not enough or too much. Which is not the message at Jesus' baptism. It is not the foundation for ministry in a weary world.

You are precious and beloved, God says. To Jesus - and to you. You are precious and beloved.

Getting the grade

Can you let that sink in? Can you let it be foundational in your life and ministry?

We all fall into the trap of trying to be good enough. Whether it is trying to get all the best grades or do our jobs perfectly or say all the right prayers or read the right books or master all the right thoughts or parent just right. We all worry about failing. And sometimes it keeps us small. Sometimes it keeps us safe.

If we can be assured that we are loved, fully, and that we can't lose that love - if that is our foundation and everything else can build from there - what might we risk learning - or trying that we wouldn't risk or try if we felt like messing up could lose it for us. Who might we talk to? Who might we share love with? If we didn't have to worry about making sure we were good enough...

What difficult situations might we enter into if we weren't so tied up in getting it all right? How might we grow?

You see there is a freedom in being rooted in our belovedness. There is a boldness - a willingness to follow curiosity - an openness to others - that comes with knowing you are loved.

And friends - let me promise you - you are. You are loved.

Looking back

In many Christian traditions, the story of Jesus' baptism is read every year - and congregants are encouraged to remember their own baptisms. Can you remember your baptism?

Or perhaps more importantly as we move through this weary world - can you remember that you are loved? You are precious and beloved.

I wonder how many times Jesus looked back to this moment. When things were really hard. When he was exhausted. When he was sad or lonely. How often did remembering who he was - that he was loved - give him strength or courage or joy?

And you, dear children, in all the wonder and challenge of your life - can you remember that you are loved? As you take risks in faith or when you are sad or as you grow and as you age - can you remember that God calls you precious? When the world tells you you are not enough - that you have something to prove - remember - remember your baptism - remember that you, child are beloved.

You, child, are loved.

Amen.

Sending - The bravest thing we can do by Sarah Are Speed

Trust your belovedness.

Let it be a protest,
an act of resistance,
a song of celebration.

Trust your belovedness in a world that is rarely satisfied.

Wear it like a badge of honor.

Speak it as confidently as your last name. Tattoo it to your heart.

When outside forces
chip away at your sense of self,
when life asks you
to hand over the keys,
remember the water.

Remember creation.

Remember how it was good,
so very good.

Let that truth hum through your veins.

Sing it so loud

that it drowns out the weariness of the world, for the bravest thing we can ever do
is trust that we belong here.

Go family of faith, in the steadfast love of God...you are precious and beloved. Amen.