

“Unimaginable Love” A sermon by Lee Ireland
Cathedral City Community Presbyterian Church
January 13, 2019, /Baptism of the Lord
Luke 3:15-17, 21-22, Isaiah 43:1-7

Let us pray together: Open our eyes to see your Spirit in our life. Open our hearts to receive the blessings you send each day. Guide us with your wisdom so that through us Christ may walk on the earth once again. Amen.

Let's take a little quiz. You have a blue Post it note on you bulletin and there's a pencil in the pew in front of you. I'll read a saying you're probably familiar with. When I read it, make a note on your paper as to whether the saying is from the Bible or not.

“Cleanliness is next to godliness.” Quote from the Bible or not?

“God will not give you more than you can handle”? When going over the answers mention - No testing has overtaken you that is not common to everyone. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tested beyond your strength, but with the testing he will also provide the way out so that you may be able to endure it. (1 Corinthians 10:13)

“My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways.” Is that from the Bible (Isaiah 55:8)

“God helps those who help themselves.”

“I have called you by name, you are mine.” (Isaiah 43: 1) I hope no one missed that one since this was from the Old Testament verse read today!

Go through the answers.

It's amazing how these quotes, Bible or not, have become a part of our national being. The non-Biblical ones are quoted, often to give someone direction in life. Likewise, the Bible quotes are used to give someone direction in life. For a society with decreasing Biblical literacy, I am delighted that these, shall we call them truisms, are so embedded in our society.

Today's readings from Luke and Isaiah each have quotes that are vitally important to each of us as a Christ-follower. The first comes from Luke's account of Jesus' baptism. The words are God speaking to Jesus: **“You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.”** Or as The Message translation of this verse: **“You are my Son, chosen and marked by my love, pride of my life.”** The second quote comes from Isaiah, **Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine.** Like the verse from Luke, the verse from Isaiah is directly from God. God is telling Isaiah what to write.

Now, the literalists in the group this morning will say, how do these verses apply to me. In the verse from Luke, God is speaking directly to Jesus. In the verse from Isaiah, God is speaking to the Hebrew people. You might be thinking that you're not Jesus nor are you a nation. And you are correct. However, these verses demonstrate God's love for his creation – and each of us are a part of God's creation. They also demonstrate what happened to you at your baptism.

At your baptism, God claimed you as God's daughter or son. What is baptism all about? The Gospel text from today certainly provides an example for us to learn from. Many of us were baptized a long time ago. You may have been a young person when you were baptized or you may have been baptized as an infant. Do you remember anything about your baptism? I was

baptized as an infant in a church in Vandalia, Illinois. What about you? How many of you were told about your baptism by your parents? How many of you know who your sponsors were?

I think many Christians, me included, don't think about our baptism with any regularity. But the day you were baptized is a very important date in your Christian life. It's the day you joined the family, God's family.

Reflect for a moment on our verses today from Luke. **"You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased."** Can you see that baptism is about identity? In baptism we become God's beloved child. Yes, that's our identity. In a time when little is secure – people change jobs, move, parents divorce splitting up families – many people are searching for who they are, for a place to belong. In our baptism we have a tangible sign that we belong to God's family. And from that identity we are empowered to go out and serve God, following Jesus' example.

Another aspect of baptism we learn from today's Gospel relates to the Holy Spirit that descended on Jesus. This is the same Spirit that baptized me and baptized you. Baptism is God's work, not humans. So, no matter what we do or if we fall short, no matter what we fail to do, nothing can remove the identity that God has given us in our baptism. Our relationship with God that is ours in baptism is one relationship we can't mess up because we didn't start it or establish it. God did. We can neglect the relationship, deny it, ignore it, run away from it, but we cannot destroy it because God loves us. God loves us so much, so totally, so absolutely that God will never let us go. We live in a world where relationships are delicate; we can know our relationship with God is as solid as a rock. I don't know about you, but for me that's good news.

There is nothing more important for any of us than to hear God call our name.

Baptism has been the central symbol of the Christian church since that early time. Baptism is the ceremony of entry into the Christian community. It makes no difference how or when you were baptized, but that you were baptized, joining the family of God. Yes, God chose you to join the family and we humans celebrate that 'choice' through the act of baptism. Calvin, the founder of the Presbyterian Church, refers to baptism as being 'engrafted into Christ' and being counted as 'God's children.' Yes, we are chosen by God and we become a part of God's family in our baptism.

A woman sits in a restaurant with her daughter, son-in-law, and only grandchild. The granddaughter plays in the lap of her grandmother, the grandmother enthralled by the child's every move. This baby girl, just barely two years old, is precious in the older woman's sight. Observers see it in their interaction. This delight gives us a glimpse into how God feels about each of us. God loves and delights in each of us.

"You are my son/daughter, with you I am well pleased." God loves each of us with a love we cannot understand. God views us differently than we do. As I read earlier, **"My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways."** God tells us not to worry, but to accept and enjoy God's blessings: **"I have called you by name, you are mine."**

These are wonderful, assuring messages from God this day and every day. Remember, no matter your circumstances or how you feel, you are a child of God loved by God with an unimaginable love.