

From the Rector's Study, the Rev. Bryce Sangster
Sunday, January 7th, 2024, The Baptism of the Lord
Genesis 1:1-5, Psalm 29, Acts 19:1-7, Mark 1:4-11

You are my beloved in whom I am well pleased. This seems to be about Jesus alone but the message for us has value if we see ourselves as the recipients of this blessing as well. Thus, the essence of our relationship is one of love and value. Why would we be in any relationship where we don't feel any value in it and see anything worthwhile in the other? I know this sounds like conditional love. And maybe it is. But conditional love seems to be connected to our relationships being transactional, and the condition being of benefit to each party in the relationship. This, however, is more about the value of the other independent of ourselves, or any direct benefit to us.

God leads the way in living this out. It is not a coincidence that this exchange about being beloved occurs at Baptism, at the beginning of the relationship. In other words, God is saying to all of us, that we are Beloved at the beginning and therefore have nothing more to prove to God or anyone else.

You may then think that I can now do anything I want, and I don't have to worry any more? No!

What this means is that we don't have to spend our time and energy worrying about our reputation and what others think of us and focus on the needs of others. But this too is a work in progress. Our heads may agree and tell us that we are beloved, and we don't have to worry anymore, but our hearts have trouble believing this, so we don't always feel we are of value and worthwhile.

And for some doing so may be its own problem.

Several years ago, preaching on this topic, I asked if there was anyone who felt beloved. One person put up their hand. Knowing the person, I realized they felt that their understanding of beloved was that they were special and better than anyone else.

This unfortunately seems to be the world's understanding of this. That this is a zero-sum game, and we are in competition with one another. But with God this is not the case. Do loving responsible parents love any of their children, some more than others, or do they have less love for their first after the others are born?

It may feel that way to the children, but not so.

That love does not diminish the more it is shared, but in reality, just the opposite. This is why we have changed the connection between Baptism, Confirmation and Communion. At one point in our history, those baptised, had to wait until confirmation to receive communion. Now we understand that baptism is about full membership in the community, so there is no adult and kids' tables but all welcome at the same table. And should the children be at the head of the table?

In Matthew 23:11 *The greatest among you will be your servant. For whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted.*

This is not about belittling ourselves with some kind of false humility but seeming our value in connection to God and others.

The Marlo Morgan story in *Mutant Message Down Under* comes to mind. On a walk about with Australian Aboriginals, she tells of sitting in a circle around the fire at the end of the walk at the end of the day. Looking across the fire and seeing those she highly respected and those she did not like, she articulates that she came to realize that those she hated showed her that she had the same traits within herself and that is why she had issues with them, and those she respected, she realized she had in a minor way, the same traits within herself as well.

Can we learn for God and one another?

Amen

The Lord bless you and watch over you,
the Lord make his face shine upon you
and be gracious to you,
the Lord look kindly on you
and give you peace;
and the blessing ...