

“In You, I Find Happiness”

Luke 3: 15-17; 21-22

“The people were filled with expectations, wondering....” This is how Luke begins our reading from Chapter 3. I can’t help but think how much we can all relate to these feelings of expectation and wonder, especially as we move beyond the Christmas season into the New Year.

I’m sure like me many of you are wondering, “What will this new year bring? Maybe a wedding. Maybe a move. Maybe something unexpected. What will this New Year bring? This single question says it all doesn’t it? It gives voice to our expectations, knowing that anything is possible in this moment of new beginnings. This single questions lets our hearts wonder with anticipation and yes I fully admit maybe even a little in trepidation.

It is easy in these moments of new beginnings to have the feelings of expectation and wonder as we begin a new year....Well that is until “real life” starts back and we seem to slip back into our usual routine.

I think that is what’s so frustrating about this whole New Year thing. It starts out bright and full of hope. We’ve got so much we want to try. There is so much we want to do...that is until we start listening to the voices which fill our airwaves and social media. It seems like just when we begin to make resolutions to grow and

become healthier versions of ourselves, the universe interjects and says... “Oh, don’t bother! You’re only going to fail anyway.” Just when we are filled with expectation and wonder, the universe tells us Oh you just need to give up.

And the sad thing is, we buy into the universe’s message. We say, Okay and we don’t notice the brightness of our new beginnings dimming. We don’t see the light of hope beginning to fade away. We listen to all the voices telling us to give up, to go back to our routines. We just don’t see, that when we do this, all the life giving transforming Kingdom building possibilities of love and grace which fill our hearts with hope and wonder are lost, forgotten forever.

But you see, our faith story doesn’t go this way. It doesn’t happen this way. It certainly isn’t told to us this way. Just look at Matthew and Luke’s Gospels. We move from the shepherds and the angels, move from the magi and the manger, not back to life as normal but rather instead we move from the manger, the place where we encountered God dwelling among us to the banks of a river. As people of faith we move towards a river where we hear God’s voice telling us, “You are my Beloved. In whom I am well pleased. In you, I find happiness.” We come to the banks of the river where we soon discover our expectations and wonder are not dismissed or diminished. Now, through Love’s pure light, they have now become words of encouragement. Our expectation and wonder have now been transformed

into empowerment, giving us the strength to become the people God has created us to be.

And it is all because we made the move from the manger to the river. For by doing so, in that river, we are reminded who we are and whose we are. And for us as people of faith that is what makes all the difference.

Let me explain: All week, I have debated on whether or not we needed a baptism sermon for today, you know a why we do what we do sort of deals, a what we believe kind of thing but as the week moved on...I realized that was not what I needed to hear.

As I watched the world go back to business as usual, politics as usual, I needed to know that the coming of Christ made and continues to make a difference for this world. I needed to hear once again that these stories that tell us the Word became flesh and dwelled among us changed and continues to change how we interact with each other. Today a baptism sermon on why we do what we do is not what I needed to hear. Instead, today, I needed to know that somehow, some way the world could not and would not go back to life before the Light of Christ came into the World.

And I don't think I am alone in this need. I've heard from other people that even though we are only 13 days into 2019, it is not really starting out that great.

As we see the world go back to business as usual or not to work at all, we need to know the coming of God, the God who dwells among us, was not just a one-time event. We need to know that we will not have to wait another whole year to experience this miracle once again.

Today, as my spirit is running dry, I find that I have a need to be renewed. I have a need to be refreshed before going back to into the world as a follower of Jesus. I have a need to be restored in my faith, in my hope, and most certainly in my vision for God's peaceable Kingdom to come here on earth. Because right now, everything feels so uncertain.

In these moments of uncertainty, I find strength from the words which ground my faith. I find hope in the words that refresh my spirit. I find this renewal in just 10 words: You are My Beloved in whom I am well pleased. These words change everything for me. These 10 words change everything for us as people of faith. They change the way we look at life and other people. These 10 words change how we interact with each other. They change how we see ourselves and how we perceive others as well.

No longer are we just individuals, disconnected and disjointed. We are God's Beloved, seen as ones made in the image of God, as ones called to embody God's love. We are God's Beloved and yes so is everyone else that we interact with on a daily basis, everyone else that lives and breathes on this planet we call

Earth. Everyone is God's Beloved, made in the image of God, called to embody God's love.

Now this is about the part of the story in which we all get a little overwhelmed. We assume that God's Beloved means God's Messiah. We tend to think that if we embrace these 10 words than it will be up to us to save the world. It will all be up to us bring world peace to this crazy hurting broken world.

Let me ease all our minds just a bit...It is not up to us to save the world. Remember again, and hear these words. We are God's Beloveds. We are not God. As people of faith, as God's Beloveds, we are not called to redeem creation. We are not called to be God's Messiahs.

That's God's job. Not ours.

All we are called to do is make a difference in our small part of our communities by sharing God's love and grace with others. We can do this one step at a time in small and ordinary ways. It is can be done by sitting and listening to someone who is hurting. It can be done by sitting and being with someone who just needs a shoulder to cry on. It can be done by feeding a meal to someone who is in need. It can be done by sending a card or giving a smile to someone who just needs to know someone cares.

On their own, these things don't seem like they are doing much good but...but we need to realize they have a bigger impact than we anticipate. They

can and do make all the difference when it comes to the work of the Kingdom of God, when it comes to sharing the love and grace of God with others.

I'm also going to let you in on something else. We need to remember God wasn't a one and done. God didn't enter into the story, enter into our lives just once. God didn't enter into our world, look around and say, I think I'm finished here.

Time and time again, God enters our lives. Time and time again, God enters into our world, creating and writing a different story. God didn't come once and leave. God stayed. God is still here constantly working to bring healing and wholeness to all of God's creation, including us as people of faith.

God is not finished yet. God is still creating. God is still speaking. Instead of telling us to give up and move on, God is inviting us to the waters once more. God is inviting us to hear the words that will bring us back to life. God is telling us, "You are my Beloved in whom I am well pleased." God is still speaking the words which will transform us, which call us, which empower us to be the people God created us and calls us to be.

And when we actually listen to them, when we actually allow them to become part of our being, to become our core, we realize that all those life giving transforming Kingdom possibilities of love and grace are our life lines. In the words of Howard Thurman, "There is something in every one of you that waits and

listens for the sound of the genuine in yourself. It is the only true guide you will ever have. And if you cannot hear it, you will all of your life spend your days on the ends of strings that somebody else pulls.” These words of God’s love are the only true guide we will ever have.

You see that’s why we come to the water before we return to the world. This act of remembering, remembering the moment the first time we heard these 10 precious words which changed our lives, this act of seeing ourselves as God’s own Beloved, this image of God’s light as it is reflected back to us through the waters, this act expands our view of the One who made us. This act of seeing ourselves as God’s Own Beloved expands our understanding of the One who is still at work in our world, bringing healing and wholeness to our lives and to our world as well.

The act of remembering who we are and whose we are before we return to the world is to help us see that we have already been empowered and equipped to make a tangible difference in our communities and in our world. We have already been transformed into beacons of light, shining bright in the darkness. WE have already been pointing to God’s peaceable Kingdom here on earth.

This act of remembering, of reminding ourselves to see ourselves, to see others as God’s Own Beloved, as ones made in the image of God frees us and empowers us to move beyond our fears and doubts, to move beyond our worries to now becoming and being the people of faith God needs us to be.

People of love, people of grace, people of hope, people who shine bright in the darkness, signaling to this world that the coming of Christ, thanks be to God, did and continues to still make a difference in our lives and in the rest of the world.

Just when the universe is telling us to give up and go back to our routines, as people of faith, we gather at the river. By the waterside, we hear another voice, a voice speaking loud and clear for all to hear, a voice that claims us and names us, a voice that tells us over and over again, You are My Beloved in you I find happiness.

And as people of faith, it is this voice that makes all the difference for us.

Today, as we gather on the banks of the river, Remember that we are claimed and named. Remember that we have been transformed. Remember that from the moment we emerge from the waters, we are called to begin to live a life based on the principles of the Kingdom of God. Realize that our mission in life is God's mission for the world as well: to share love, offer healing and comfort, to make justice and peace, to extend grace to all of God's children. Today, as we gather on the banks of the river, remember you have been transformed by love, now empowered the Spirit, to share the good news of God's love and grace.

In just a few moments, you will be invited to come forward and see yourself-see yourself reflected back in the water as one made in the image of God. In seeing

your beautiful and beloved reflection, remember your call as one of God's children to bring hope and grace to all that are hurting.

remember you call as one of God's servants to support those around you on their journey.

Remember that you are empower through the Holy Spirit to renew, to refresh, to inspire those around you.

Remember you are God's Beloved.

Thanks be to God. Amen.