

## You Are My Beloved

Mark 4: 4-11

This is always one of my favorite Sundays. It gives me the chance to truly share in the blessing of God's love with each of you as your pastor in a special and significant way. It is always so humbling for me, watching everyone come forward, seeing people dip their hands in the water. It is always so humbling for me, looking everyone in the eye and saying, "You are God's Beloved, in whom God is well pleased."

That's why I love this service. It never grows old. It never gets stale. Each and every year, I am reminded of how God's grace surrounds us, how it fills us as we dip our hands into the water. In that moment, that moment when the water is still dripping from our hands, we are all reminded that we are all God's children.

This particular Sunday never ceases to amaze me. Each and every year, I am humbled by what I see, by what I get to experience with each and every one of you. When I look at everyone's face as they come forward, I see is trust. I see is love. I see is grace. I get to have a holy experience with everyone as we dip our hands into the water. This holy experience is something that I have never been able to put into words until now.

It has always seemed like the mystery of the moment could never be captured by mere words alone, that the swelling of emotions could never really be summed up in terms we could understand, that the significance of this act of faith each and every year could never really be captured.

It seems like every year, when we come to the moment in the service, the moment when we remember our baptism, that moment when we recommit ourselves to God, that moment when we pray for renewal, it seems like every year, words fail me. Every year, it seems like words fail to capture or describe this powerful and humbling moment that I get to experience with each of you. That is until now.

#### Read Scripture: Message Version

I am not sure what is different about this year but as I sat down to begin sermon prep, as I read Mark's words about Jesus' baptism, I realized that was it. He had captured exactly what I wanted to say. He had captured exactly what I was feeling in that moment that I get to experience with each of you. That moment, when the hands are being lifted up out of the water, and they are still dripping wet, and my hands are clasping yours, and I get to look you in the eye and say, You are God's Beloved in whom God is well pleased, that moment, in its humbling and powerful nature, that moment truly does feel like the heavens are opening up and

God's Spirit is descending down upon us, surrounding us with God's grace and God's love.

That moment truly does feel like the presence of God's Spirit is filling this space. Because in that moment, it becomes exceedingly clear who we are and whose we are. Because in that moment, we are reminded that from our very beginning, we are marked by God's love and it is a mark that will not fade over time. We are reminded that it is a mark that never can be removed no matter what we do. We are reminded that it is a mark that will and does transcend all the other labels and scars that we may receive during our lifetime.

Because in that moment, when our hands are still dripping wet, we are reminded that God's love is a mark that will and does become our primary identity, a mark that tells us who we are and whose we are for all times.

As I prepared for this year's service and reflected over all the past years that we have done this service together, I realized that each year this service is the same yet different. Each year we hear a similar story of Jesus' baptism yet each year the story really is different. Maybe that is why words seemed to capture the special moment for me this year. I realized that the power of the story is the same yet we are different. We are not the same people we were a year ago at this time. We are not the same people who just last year at this time dipped their hands into the water

and prayed for renewal. We are not the same people. We have changed. We have grown in faith.

Yet even with the changes in our lives, at the core, we are still the same. We are still and forever will be marked by God's love. We are still and forever will be children of God.

that is why the story of Jesus' baptism speaks to us time and time again. That is why the story of Jesus' baptism is so humbling and so powerful. Because it sees beyond the changes in our lives and speaks to the very heart of our faith experience, speaks to the very heart of our experience with God. The story of Jesus' baptism speaks to the very fact that today and all days we are surrounded and filled with God's love and grace.

Today as we remember our baptism, remember what it was like to emerge from the water, remember what it was like to have the water on our fore heads and remember God's promises that were made to you on that day.

Today, as you dip your hands into the water, Remember that you are claimed and named as one of God's Beloved Children. Remember that you are marked by God's love. This is a mark that will never fade over time, a mark that will and does transcend all the other labels and scars that we may receive during our lifetime. A

mark that is our primary identity, a mark that reminds who we are and most importantly whose we are now and forevermore.

Amen.