
God Still Speaks

**A sermon by the Rev. Canon Lauren Holder
The Feast of the Baptism of Our Lord – Year B**

If you had a little déjà vu moment while listening to today's Gospel reading, you're not alone. We did just hear this same telling of Jesus' baptism from the Gospel of Mark less than a month ago on the second Sunday of Advent.

What I love about hearing this same text a few weeks apart is how different they sound based on when we are hearing them. It reminds me that the Holy Scriptures are living and active. No matter how many times we read them, there is always something new to discover... always a new way God will show up in the text.

When I hear this text in Advent, I'm struck by how John is preparing the way for Jesus. John knows that he has something good and life changing to offer, and all the people leaving the city to venture into the wilderness with him must know it too. But John also knows his own limits, knows there is more to give, and points to Jesus as the one to give it. John prepares the way as we prepare for God to be born to us again in the season of Advent.

But now we are in the season of Epiphany! I would say it's my favorite season of all, but I know I'd want to say the same of Lent when it comes, or Easter, or Pentecost, or Advent again... these seasons of the church seem to show up right when we need a mental shift, or a heart shift.

I do love Epiphany.

And listening to this same text today, on the first Sunday after Epiphany, I'm struck less by the preparation of John and more by the inbreaking of Jesus on the scene and the inbreaking of God's spoken word: *You are my beloved*.

Jesus comes out to this wild place, Jesus steps into the muddy waters of the Jordan River, Jesus comes to be baptized.

And as Jesus emerges from the waters of baptism, he looks up to find the sky torn apart! We tend to gloss over this dramatic moment to focus instead on the Holy Spirit descending like a dove... such a gentle image it conjures up... but pay attention to the words immediately preceding the sweet dove: "he saw the heavens torn apart." The Greek word used here is *schizomenous*—to split or sever, to rend or divide asunder.

Something big is happening here! God is showing up! God is doing something!

And what is God doing?

God is speaking.

God says: *You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased*.

Words matter to God. Words do something—words are actions with God.

It may be hard for us to comprehend this because we live in a world where people are more inclined to throw words at a problem than address it. We hide behind our words when we rant on Facebook about whatever injustice has caught our attention, or simply tweet "thoughts and prayers" when we feel like we have to say something, but don't know where to begin.

Well, we can begin by speaking words rather than typing them.

We can speak to the person in the elevator, we can speak to our neighbor with the offensive flag, we can speak to the fellow parent in the front office waiting to pick their kid up early for a dentist appointment, we can speak to that unfamiliar face in the pew beside us,

we can speak to that friend we haven't talked to in months and we're afraid to call them because we're embarrassed it has been so long, we can speak to that colleague whose wife just died and we're afraid to say the wrong thing.

Words do something. Words are actions when we speak them.

God knows this. God teaches us this again and again, beginning with the creation story we heard earlier. God speaks: *Let there be light*.

Even when God is alone, even when it seems there is no one for God to speak to, God speaks into the void, speaks through the sweeping wind, speaks over the water: *Let there be light*.

God speaks. And the words do something.

God speaks. And the words create something.

What is God saying to you?

What new life is God speaking into being in you?

I know that may be a hard question to answer. It can be especially hard when the heavens above you don't split in two to announce God's presence. Hey! Up here! Pay attention! God is about to speak!!

But God does still speak. I promise you, God still speaks.

I have heard the voice of God. Some of you have heard the voice of God. Maybe all of you have heard God speak, but maybe we don't always recognize the voice. It can be hard when there are so many voices—so much noise.

I can tell you that when God speaks to me, something usually grabs my attention first. It may not be the heavens torn apart or a dove descending from above, but something grabs hold of my attention and causes me to stop—to pause—to look—to listen—to pray—to answer the phone—to write down the thought—to show up—or even to stay home.

When something grabs your attention, listen up. Listen for the voice of God—a voice that may be more familiar than you expect—listen for God speaking to you.

Because when God speaks, the words do something. Maybe it's a word of love, like the words Jesus needed to hear before beginning his ministry: *You are my beloved*.

When God speaks, the words create something. Maybe it's a word of light reminding you to shine the light of Christ in the way only you can: *Let there be light*.

In a few moments, we'll speak some words over the waters of baptism, right here in this church. We'll recall the stories of creation, of exodus, of baptism, of resurrection, and we'll speak those stories over the water poured into the font. Our words are words of thanksgiving. Our words are words of prayer and blessing. And speaking the words does something to the water and to us. Speaking the words in the presence of God and in this Body of Christ gathered together creates something holy. It names and claims the Holy Spirit among us and within us.

We know that these children of God who come forward today to receive the sacrament of baptism are already blessed, already God's beloved. And yet speaking these truths aloud does something. It does something to the people baptized, to the people bringing them forward to be baptized, and to every single one of us who welcome them into this community of faith.

Words do something—words create something.

And all of us are about to be changed.

Are you ready?

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