
"You Are My Beloved"

A Meditation on Baptism by the Rev. Canon George Maxwell using Mark 1:9–13

We begin this morning with a story about Jesus.

Mark tells it with striking simplicity. Jesus comes from Nazareth and goes down into the Jordan, where he is baptized by John. There are no long explanations or speeches. Jesus simply steps into the water. When he comes up, something extraordinary happens. The heavens are torn open. The Spirit descends like a dove. A voice speaks: "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased."

This word is spoken before Jesus has healed anyone or taught a single parable. It comes before he has confronted evil or gathered disciples. A word is given to him before anything is accomplished. It is not a command or a task. It is a naming: You are my beloved.

That sequence matters. Jesus does not earn this identity or prove himself worthy of it. He receives it. This is why this passage is read on a day like today.

In a few moments, we will bring a child to the water. This child has done nothing to deserve what is about to be given. There are no achievements to point to, no beliefs carefully articulated, no moral record to examine. There is simply a life, received as gift. Over that life, the Church dares to speak a word just as bold as the one spoken over Jesus: You are God's beloved.

Mark does not stop the story there. Immediately after the voice from heaven, the Spirit drives Jesus into the wilderness. This happens because the world Jesus is entering does not easily remember such words.

In the wilderness, Jesus is tempted to forget who he is. He is tempted to prove himself, to secure himself, and to impress others. Each temptation pulls him toward grounding his identity in power, success, or control rather than in belovedness. This detail matters for us as well, because baptism does not remove a child, or any of us, from the wilderness. It changes how we enter it.

Baptism does not spare us from struggle. It gives us a word to carry with us when struggle comes.

This child will grow up in a world that offers many substitutes for identity. The world tells us that we are defined by what we achieve, what we possess, or what others say about us. These voices are loud and persistent, and they are often convincing. The Church cannot silence them. The Church can, however, keep speaking a truer voice.

In teaching and story, the Church repeats it. In bread and wine, the Church enacts it. In prayer, the Church returns to it. In community, the Church gives it flesh. Again and again, in ordinary and faithful ways, the Church says that we are not self-made, not disposable, and not forgotten. We are beloved.

This is why baptism is never only about the one being baptized. It also concerns all of us. Each baptism recalls our own. It reminds us that our life with God began with God's delight, not with our decision or understanding. When we forget this, as we inevitably do, we return. We return to the water, to the table, to the prayers, and to the story, so that we may remember who we already are.

At the end of today's passage, Jesus remains in the wilderness. The struggle continues. Yet one thing has already been settled. He knows whose he is. That knowledge will not remove suffering from his life, but it will carry him through it.

That same knowledge, given rather than earned, is what we entrust to this child today. It is offered as a truth

deep enough to return to again and again: You are my beloved.

It is my hope that this voice be louder than all the others and that this child hear it echoed in this family and this church, again and again.

And it is my hope that we, who have heard it before, learn once more how to live as though it were true.

Amen.

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