

“Our Baptismal Connection” – Luke 3: 15-16, 21-22

You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased. We hear these words and think of Jesus. Given our historic understanding and interpretation of this passage, that is understandable. I don't think that is the whole story, the whole message, if you will. I say this because in the Baptism ritual when an individual is baptized, these words are proclaimed, I baptize you in the name of God, our Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer. Another way to hear this is: You are mine, and I claim you. You are my beloved, I know you, see you, love you. You matter to me.

According to Luke's (account), all we know about the baptism of Jesus is that it was with 'all the people.' Jesus simply got in line with everyone who had been broken by the 'wear and tear' of (life.) At his baptism, (Jesus) identified with the damaged and broken people who need God. (Robert M. Bearley, Feasting on the Word, Year. Vol. 1, pg236)

It can be said that Jesus got in line with the people who needed hope; people, like us, who need community and connection; people who need to be seen and told they matter.

This is an essential theme in Luke. Jesus sees those no one else does – the widow at Nain. Zacchaeus up in a tree. Jesus tells stories of persons whose goodness is defined by coming near and seeing those whom most refuse to see, for example, the parable of the Good Samaritan. The Samaritan, who is never called 'good' in the parable by the way, is first good because he draws near and truly sees the guy in the ditch. The priest and the Levite? They see, but do not see. They do not see for whom Jesus came. They are unwilling to see those whom they themselves have excluded from God's favor. (Karoline Lewis, dearworkingpreacher, January 6, 2019)

Baptism means being truly seen, being welcomed and included. It also means hearing the call to welcome and include others, because Baptism unites and connects us, not just with one another, but all, anywhere, who are baptized in the faith. By being baptized we, in the words of Ronald Allen, *become part of a new social world.* This new social world has, as its foundation the same Spirit as Jesus, a Spirit that seeks to *serve God's purpose, which is to bring justice. Justice here refers to qualities of life (that create) communities which intentionally welcome, include, and support all.*

(workingpreacher, Commentary on Luke 3:15-17, 21-22)

Such community is about more than doing acts of charity or good works. It is about inclusion that brings true, deep, meaningful connections. It is about telling people, in word and deed, their presence matters. This is something all of us need to be reminded of, for each of us could be more intentional when it comes to doing this.

It was Christmas, and the black SUV was there again. From behind the curtains, Johnny, a middle schooler, could see the people stepping out of the car onto the fresh-fallen snow. 'Why do they always have to come only at Christmas?' he thought. 'Who asked them? Christmas was hard enough just being a disappointing bore. Why did it also have to hurt? He already had to put up with enough criticism and ridicule in school. Wasn't that bad enough? Why did it have to follow him home?

His mind went back to the last day of school before Christmas break. The kids were so excited and would go on about the newest X-box, or cell phone, or I-Pad, or handheld computer, and all

that Santa would bring them because they had been so good. Their Christmas joys hardly fit in with the new socks he was sure to receive.

At his age, he was just about two years beyond any belief in some mysterious North Pole justice for whatever good he had done this past year. That was for little kids who didn't know his reward would always be socks while the rewards of others would be computers, cellphones and other things we would not receive.

He could see the people from the SUV making their way up the steps. It was the same people every year. The man in the overcoat. The two boys he knew from school who talked about him and laughed at him behind his back. The same two boys who never talked to him, never invited him to youth group or church. 'Don't they look proud,' he thought. 'I sure used to act dumb when they came.' He remembered the way he used to feel about the SUV when he was younger. He used to wait all day at the window. But that was before, when he hoped that maybe the boys would look at him, remember him, and talk to him, even just say to say, 'hi', when he saw them in town or at school. That was back before he realized why they were coming.

They were on the porch now. The taller of the two boys was carrying the box. 'I wonder of all the cans are dented this year,' Johnny thought. Some of the cans last year didn't even have labels.

'I won't come out,' he thought, as he heard the knock on the door. 'They'll not look right through me and feel like big shots again. Let mom take the food. Let her eat it, too.' The door was open now and someone was saying 'We're from the United Methodist Church. Merry Christmas!'

Johnny didn't look, but his mind saw faces and the time passed, and he knew his mother had accepted the food basket. His little sister squealed, and he heard his mother say, "Thank you.'

'God bless you,' said the man at the door. Johnny began to cry. 'Don't they know,' he thought, 'a gift has to come from a friend. That the food in the Christmas present is their present, not mine.' It would be a long time before Johnny would come out from behind that curtain. It would be years before he would learn to forgive the people. Yet he would never forget that the SUV only came at Christmas.

(adaptation of The Green Station Wagon by Bud Harron, December 20, 1974)

My friends, it is not enough to celebrate our Baptism. We need to remember what our Baptism proclaims, God's affirmation that we are beloved children, connected to God, each other and the world.

So, let us celebrate and live out what it means to be beloved children, who are seen, known and matter, by living out our baptismal connection, as we seek to become part of a new social world. One that sees, welcomes, invites and includes everyone, including those who have been told they do not belong.