

Let's **set the stage** for the **dramatic story**

- We hear **this morning:**

It is occurs **not** in the **safety** of a **sacred place**

- But **out in the wilderness,**
- On **the edge of society**

This passage comes from

- The **very beginning** of **Mark's Gospel**

Jesus has **come out** of the **waters of the Jordan,**

- Having been **baptized by John.**

And **remember,** at this point, **in Jesus' life**

- Jesus **had not** done **any of the things**
- **We think of** when **we think of Jesus**

He **hadn't** turned water into wine,

- Or **fed the five thousand;**
- **Walked on water, none of that...**

His **greatness** was **just an expectation,**

- His **life** was
- **A yet unfulfilled promise.**

But **despite** his lack

- Of **accomplishments**

- A **voice** anoints **Jesus**,
- *"This is **my Son**, the **beloved***
- *With whom **I am well pleased.**"*

One word stands out.

- **"Beloved"**
- For **we, like** Jesus, are **also** God's **beloved children.**

If there is **one thing**

- That **I would like** to **communicate**
- To **anyone** who **will listen**,
- It is that **they- you- me-**
- We are **beloved, cherished by God,**

Not just "liked" some of the time"

- **But loved** beyond **doubt** or **reason.**

Now, **one would think** that **being supremely loved**

- Would be **music to our ears.**

But, these words **can be hard** to **hear**,

- And even **more difficult** to **internalize.**

"You are my beloved" is **hard to hear** because

- **The world** is **filled with voices**
- That **shout** things like:
- You are **not beautiful enough**

- You **don't have enough** of **this or that**;
- You're a **nobody**-
- **Unless** you can **demonstrate** the **opposite**.

We **inhabit a world** where:

- It is very hard **to belong**
- Where **not-belonging** is actually **the norm**,
- Where **animate** and **inanimate boundaries**
- **Separate** and **divide God's children**.

The powers and principalities

- Would **have you believe** that:
- The **"in" crowd** is **very small**,
- Just a **select, ultra special** few.

And those are **just the outside voices**.

I would venture

- That **other negative voices**
- Come from **within**.

This is the **voice** of

- **Self-rejection**.

The inner-voice that says

- "You don't **deserve love**."

Self-rejection *not only* reflects itself in

- Our **inner life**,

But **it squashes**

- Any **desire we have** to **bless others**.

What a world it would be

- If we were **more in touch** with our **blessedness?**

So I said it:

- **“You are beloved.”**

Some of you have heard

- These **exact words**
- **Preached** for a **lifetime** by **countless others**.

We’ve **heard the words**

- **Why then** are we not
- All **walking around** as if it’s **true?**

Why do I know that **some of us** will **leave church**

- Feeling more **cursed than blessed?**

The **reason I know this** is because

- **Words** are **rarely ever** enough,

- To **bring the love of God to someone.**

Let me **explain-**

Jesus' baptism differs from John's **other baptisms.**

- In that **something** happens **along with it**

There is **a dove,**

- A **spirit-like presence,** a **strange voice**

This is **the Bible way** of saying

- **"God is present."**
- **That God** is **revealing God's-self;**
- That an **epiphany** is happening

You see, there was **no way**

- That **John the Baptist**
- Could **tell anyone, in words, about** Jesus.

And **that goes** for every other **preacher**

- Through **the centuries** who **has wanted**
- **Desperately** to **communicate God's love**

It will **never be enough**

- To **tell you about God.**

You have to **experience God** yourself.

- God **comes to us** through **revelation**

And **what is revelation?**

- **Revelation** is **what we glean**
- From **meeting God** amidst
- The **wonder** and
- The **mystery** and
- The **pain**
- Of **lived experience**.

Here is an **example**:

The writer **Ann Lamott** writes of **being one of those people**

- **Who'd heard all the sermons**
- Knew **all the words**
- But who found herself **in a world of hurt**
- **Pain** of **her own making**
- **Complete** with **lots of negative voices**.

But despite her **self-proclaimed undeservedness**

- **Despite her religious cynicism**
-there **was God**.

She **writes**:

*One night,
Lying in **the darkness**,
I became aware of **someone with me**,
Hunkered down in the corner.
I knew it was Jesus.*

*I felt him just sitting there
On his haunches
In the corner of my sleeping loft,
Watching me with patience and love.*

*For the next few days
I sensed Jesus following me everywhere,
Like a little cat.
Finally,
I took a long deep breath
And said out loud,
'All right. You can come in.'*

Skeptical?

- You think **sermons** or **pipe organs**
- **Communicate God?**

Ever thought **why we baptize babies?**

- A baby can't **understand** the **Apostle's Creed**,
- Can't **obey** the **Ten Commandments**.

Remember: **God claimed Jesus as his beloved**

- Before **he'd done anything**.

Likewise, we **baptize** in **promise**, in **expectation**

- **That God will work** in the **child's life**.
- That God **will be revealed... at some point**

We baptize **everybody**, regardless **of age**,

- Into the **same promise**.

Let's **talk about Baptism**:

- We sometimes **describe it**
- As a **Rite of initiation** into the **Church**.

But when we say "**initiation**," are **we saying** that

- The **performing of this ritual**
- Is **necessary for God?**

Does God love **only babies** who've **been baptized?**

- That is **maybe the craziest, messed up idea**
- **I've ever heard**

In the **family of God**,

- The **given** is that
- Everyone is **already a member** from the **get-go**

Baptism **is done** to **remind people**

- That they are **already God's sacred possession**

The Service of Baptism **isn't for God**

- It's **for us.**
- **The revelation can come later**

Don't **over think** the **concept of revelation**

- Or **get caught up** in idea that
- A **dove** or **woosh of wind**
- Has to **accompany an epiphany**

Let this **instead an invitation**

- To embrace **those moments**
- When, **despite everything** to the **contrary,**
- You **just now** that you are **going to be OK**
- **That yes, somehow you are loved.**

That time when **you just can't**

- **Deny God's love** any longer.

It **happens** when it **happens**

- You're **taking a shower**
- You stare up at **a bright blue sky**
- Or you're **talking to the cashier at HEB;**
- You're **watching your son build Legos,**

And **just** when you thought **that was it,**

- Something **otherworldly happens**
- Something **inexplicable** but **undeniable,**
- All occurring **in its own way.**

And you, despite **reservations,**

- You are **drawn near** to the **love of God**
- And your **Baptism makes sense.**

You **ARE** a **beloved child of God.**

And all **those voices**-the **ones saying**

- “You don’t **deserve love.**

Those voices **preaching exclusion** and **division**

- **The voice of self-rejection**

All those voices **fade,** only to be

- **Replaced by a peace**
- That **no preacher could do justice** in describing

And **the moment** one **recognizes** that **God is in their life,**

- That **God’s been there all along**
- They are **“in.”**

And when **you know that**

- Then to **get to live in cooperation** with God
- Is to **live inside** an **unexplainable hope,**

- Because your life **has become**
- **Much larger** than **your own**.

It's not about **listening to more sermons**;

- Don't wait to be **convinced of God**.

Look around at **the people in your life**;

- At the **landscape of your existence**,

And **with them** and in **the place where you live**

- It is **there** you **will discover** your **belovedness**.

Amen.