

“With many words Luke has told us of the births of John the Baptist and Jesus. Now with few words Luke will transition from the end of John’s preaching mission to the beginning of Jesus’ public ministry.”<sup>1</sup>

Previously in Luke’s gospel account we are told a detailed family account in the stories surrounding both John and Jesus. The angel Gabriel visits with good news of births to both Zechariah and Mary. We are informed of Elizabeth’s lineage, who is a descendant of Aaron, and of Zechariah being rendered mute on account of his disbelief that a child will be born to them in their advancing years. We are told the story of Mary’s visit to her kin Elizabeth, for support and a safe place to land, of John leaping in Elizabeth’s womb upon the encounter with the two pregnant women, of Mary’s willingness to respond to the good news declared by the angel and her song of hope, a song echoed by the women who came before her. Luke gives us a lot of detail.

But now as we move from John’s witness out there by the river Jordan, his strong language urging the people to a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, the doorway, the gate, between John’s witness and Jesus’ ministry is Jesus’ baptism and this baptism is “merely reported in one-half of one verse: ‘When all the people were being baptized, Jesus was baptized too.’”<sup>2</sup>

In this short verse, as Rev. Robert Brearly writes in his commentary, “According to Luke, all we know about the baptism of Jesus is that it was with ‘all the people’...Jesus presented himself for baptism as an act of solidarity with a nation and a world of sinners. Jesus simply got in line with everyone who had been broken by the “wear and tear” of this selfish world and had all but given up on themselves and their God. When the line of downtrodden and sin-sick people formed in hopes of new beginnings through a return to God, Jesus joined them. At his baptism, he identified with the damaged and broken people who needed God.”<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Robert M. Brearly, *Feasting on the Word*, Year C, vol. 1, 2009, Westminster John Knox Press, p. 236

<sup>2</sup> *ibid*

<sup>3</sup> *ibid*

As I was walking home from the office making my way up the hill on Upper Queen Street, a family was making its way down the hill toward me. A young mother pushed a toddler in a stroller, as a young father kept his watchful eye on an older child, a boy, who, with energy to spare, ran ahead, behind, and then again beside his parents on the sidewalk.

I noticed the boy right away because he was wearing a headlamp, one of those lamps that hikers or campers wear when it gets dark, and he had it turned on; it shone brightly even though the sun was still out. He pointed the light on his head this way and that, into spaces that caught his attention, toward the things that he was curious about, scouting for treasures he might unearth. His head lamp shone the way.

But, given his young age, perhaps 5 or 6 years old or so, it was his parents' proximity, and their careful attention to his safety, that gave him the confidence and the ability to explore. When he got too far ahead, he would return, and then start over again; his parents remaining the secure base where he would move off and away from to explore and the safe haven to return to when he got too far ahead of himself.

Luke's gospel account gives us the detail that right after he is baptized, Jesus prays. It is as Jesus is praying that the heavens are opened and the Holy Spirit descends upon him in bodily form like a dove. It is as Jesus is praying that a voice comes from heaven saying, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased." The voice declares the relationship and the identity, and in his praying, Jesus knows to whom he belongs and from where his life and his ministry will flow.

This relationship and identity, like all the people, will be the place from which Jesus will continue to grow, explore, and take risks, knowing that again and again, he can and will return to God through prayer. Luke will show this repeatedly throughout the gospel. This God most High, the one Jesus calls "Abba" or Father, is the one who claims him and speaks words of assurance to him, giving him a stable place to land, repeating to him

over and over again when things become uncertain or dangerous: “You are my son, you are mine, my beloved, I’m proud of you, with you I’m well pleased.”

This is the relationship established through the waters of baptism animated by the power of the Holy Spirit; this God who crosses boundaries and borders to come to us. The renewed relationship between God and the people becomes an unshakeable bond which permits growth, exploration, and risk-taking always for the sake of love, for new beginnings, for this kingdom of God of justice and mercy, for compassion which heals the world.

Rev. Dr. Jacqui Lewis writes, “In any relationship, fierce love causes us to cross boundaries and borders to discover one another, to support one another, to heal one another. When we do this, when we go crazy with affection, and offer wild kindness to our neighbour across the street or across the globe, we make a new kind of space between us. We make space for discovery and curiosity, for learning and growing...and being changed by what we share.”<sup>4</sup>

In this strong love of God, Jesus is baptized with all the others who stand in line: the sinners, the sick, the people who want to believe but have so many doubts, the forgotten, the fearful, the least, the littlest. Jesus does this out of profound human connection and union and it is the place from where he launches his ministry, knowing his rootedness is in the one he calls “Father”, the relationship and identity he can and will return to again and again - “You are my Son, the Beloved, with you I am well pleased.”

The same holds true for us. “We need to hear this affirmation from God, and we need to hear it from each other. These are life-giving words that every human being upon this earth should hear: “You are my child, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.” When Jesus heard those words

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<sup>4</sup> Jacqui Lewis, *Fierce Love: A Bold Path to Ferocious Courage and Rule-Breaking Kindness That Can Heal the World*, 2021, Harmony Books, pp. 103-104, 109-110

they changed his life forever.”<sup>5</sup> May they do the same for us and may our baptismal calling light the way for a world in need of the unshakeable love of God.

Amen.

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<sup>5</sup> Robert M. Brearly, *Feasting on the Word, Year C*, vol. 1, 2009, Westminster John Knox Press, p. 240