

“You Are God’s!”

“Back when the telegraph was the fastest means of long-distance communication, there was a story, perhaps apocryphal, about a young man who applied for a job as a Morse code operator. Answering an ad in the newspaper, he went to the address that was listed. When he arrived, he entered a large, noisy office. In the background a telegraph clacked away.” **“A sign on the receptionist’s counter instructed job applicants to fill out a form and wait until they were summoned to enter the inner office.”**

“The young man completed his form and sat down with seven other waiting applicants. After a few minutes, the young man stood up, crossed the room to the door of the inner office, and walked right in. Naturally the other applicants perked up, wondering what was going on. Why had this man been so bold? They muttered among themselves that they hadn’t heard any summons yet. They took more than a little satisfaction in assuming the young man who went into the office would be reprimanded for his presumption and summarily disqualified for the job.

Within a few minutes the young man emerged from the inner office escorted by the interviewer, who announced to the other applicants, ‘Gentlemen, thank you very much for coming, but the job has been filled by this young man.’

The other applicants began grumbling to each other, and then one spoke up, ‘Wait a minute – I don’t understand. He was the last one to come in, and we never even got a chance to be interviewed. Yet he got the job. That’s not fair.’

The employer responded, **‘All the time you’ve been sitting here, the telegraph has been ticking out the following message in Morse code: ‘If you understand this message, then come right in. The job is yours.’ None of you heard it or understood it. This young man did. So the job is his.’**” (sermons.com staff)

The Baptism of Jesus marks a major turning point in his life. He was about to enter his public ministry, which would be fraught with all sorts of potential danger. As Jesus went through the experience of his Baptism, it was crucial for him to pay close attention – to listen carefully, so like the young man applying for the telegraph job, Jesus would be able to follow the instructions for the fulfillment of his calling. Indeed, following his Baptism at the conclusion of our Gospel Lectionary Reading, the Scripture reports in **verse 22b, “And a Voice came from heaven, ‘You are My Own Dear Son. I am pleased with you.’”**

Jesus’ Baptism was very dramatic! The major participants were Jesus, John the Baptist, and God. Their interactions and expectations on that occasion were very complex. Referring to the assumptions of the Baptizer, Barbara Brown Taylor wrote in her sermon, “Sacramental Mud,” about the stark contrast between the “ax-wielding arsonist” John warned the crowd about in verse 17 and the “gentle carpenter whom the Holy Spirit chose for a roost” who shows up, along with the crowd, to be baptized. She described the revelation that occurred in this scene in simple terms: Jesus “goes into the waters of the Jordan a carpenter and comes out a Messiah. He is the same person, but with a new direction. His being is the same, but his doing is about to take a radical turn.” **“It’s a subtle twist on the notion of ‘repentance,’ which means, of course, a turning away, taking a new direction. Jesus doesn’t have to turn away from sin, but according to Taylor, he is turning now toward his ministry.”** (As reported by Kate Matthews in her Reflection, “Affirmed by Love/Beloved, Be Loved” in Weekly Seeds for January 10, 2016 about Barbara Brown Taylor’s sermon, “Sacramental Mud”)

Jesus heard the Voice from heaven, which is presumed to have been the speaking of God. Having this experience, what did God’s message mean to Jesus? There is little doubt Jesus knew what the Book of Isaiah reported, especially the portion we used in today’s Call To Worship. Therefore, what God said to

him following his Baptism in our Reading would have seemed very familiar to Jesus because of its similarity with the Creator's message through the prophet in the Book of Isaiah. Specifically, Jesus certainly thought of God's words in **Isaiah 43:1b**, ***“Do not be afraid — I will save you. I have called you by name — you are Mine.”*** Surely it was comforting for Jesus to understand God's Voice was reassuring him of the Divine Parent's protection and special relationship – that he belonged to God – was the Creator's Beloved Son!

What the Voice said to Jesus would have also led him to recall the next few verses, especially **Isaiah 43:2 and 4b**, ***“When you pass through deep waters, I will be with you; your troubles will not overwhelm you. ... you are precious to Me ... because I love you and give you honor.”*** So, the Voice's words also comforted him because they reminded Jesus God loves him, honors him, will be with him, will not allow his troubles to overwhelm him, and that he is precious to God. Jesus understood he would have to endure many troubles, even death, but he would not be alone for his Divine Parent would be with him and raise him up to life!

Since we all belong to God through our union with our Savior, Jesus the Christ, which is especially symbolized in our baptism in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, our Divine Parent also calls us by name and we belong to the Almighty. Those promises in Isaiah are therefore given to us! Kate Matthews provides insight on this, writing, “God's love didn't start yesterday, or even in the New Testament. It is ancient, before time, it is from of old, and it is focused on each and every one of us, by name. We belong to God, and God loves us. It's as if God is trying to say to each one of us, **‘No matter what happens and no matter how low and discouraged you feel, no matter what is happening around you and in your life, don't you ever let anyone tell you that you are anything but a precious and beloved child of God.’**” (“Affirmed by Love/Beloved, Be Loved” Kate Matthews in Weekly Seeds for January 10, 2016)

Returning to the Lectionary Old Testament Reading, which we utilized in our Call To Worship, **Isaiah 43:5 sums up God's comforting promise through the prophet, saying, “Do not be afraid — I am with you!”** Especially in troubling times, such as now, when there have been terrorist attacks and arrests of would be terrorists in the news along with the stock market taking a significant decline during this past week, it is good to be reminded our Divine Parent is with us and we ultimately have no reason to be afraid! **What are those scary things which have been troubling you?** When you face such a prospect, clear your mind, and then, picture yourself with Jesus immediately following his Baptism. Hear the message of the Voice of God and know you too are the Divine Parent's Child, with whom God is pleased. Recall also God's promises through the prophet and celebrate our Creator's commitment to always be with us – to deliver us from being utterly destroyed by troubles.

Kate Matthews helps us respond to the further implications coming from our recalling of God's message to Jesus following his Baptism. Matthew's wrote, **“The next question, then, is how will we acknowledge that ‘belovedness’ in all of God's children, not just in us, not just in those we love and can ‘accept’ in the circle of God's grace.”** Jesus' Radical and Extravagant Hospitality toward everyone, even the tax collectors, outcasts, and sinners, provide us the example of how we are to relate toward others, especially those rejected by society. **To anyone who is in need of the Good News of God's Loving Presence and the Divine Parent's Commitment to relieve us of our fears, let us also show Radical and Extravagant Hospitality and God's Self-Giving and Sacrificial Agape Love.** Let's celebrate that we belong to our Divine Parent and let us share the Good News with everyone, who needs God's Agape Love and the Good News of God's overcoming of our fears! Amen.