

“Connect with Your Belovedness”

Imagine what your relationships would be like without the **fear of rejection**. As we remember the Baptism of Jesus to which we are connected through our own baptism, it is valuable to take note the voice of God proclaimed of Jesus and to all of us, **“You are My Beloved.”** Let’s welcome that Good News by living in the abundance of God’s Grace and Acceptance and by offering God’s Invitation to that Beloved Relationship with our Divine Parent to others!

The experience of Jesus’ Baptism reminds us of our own need to experience the “Agape Love” of our family, friends, other persons, and, especially of God. Indeed, part of what took place when Jesus was baptized has been reduplicated in many of our own relationships with our parents and other loved ones.

As I mentioned last Sunday, Margaret and I recently viewed the new movie, **“A Beautiful Day in the Neighborhood”**, which I highly recommend, although it is most likely too intense for young children. The movie revealed the formulation of the relationship between Rev. Fred Rogers and his interviewer for an **Esquire Magazine article**. In the actual Esquire article, its author, Tom Junod, shared his insights about Rogers and the way he related with children and adults. Last Sunday, I shared some of those stories. Returning to the truth that **part of what took place when Jesus was baptized has been reduplicated in many of our own relationships with our parents and other loved ones**, listen to following story from the article, “Once upon a time, a little boy with a big sword went into battle against Mister Rogers. Or maybe, if the truth be told, Mister Rogers went into battle against a little boy with a big sword, for Mister Rogers didn’t like the big sword. It was one of those swords that really isn’t a sword at all; it was a big plastic contraption with lights and sound effects, and it was the kind of sword used in defense of the universe by the heroes of the television shows that the little boy liked to watch. The little boy with the big sword did not watch Mister Rogers. In fact, the little boy with the big sword didn’t know who Mister Rogers was, and so when Mister Rogers knelt down in front of him, the little boy with the big sword looked past him and through him, and when Mister Rogers said, ‘Oh, my, that’s a big sword you have,’ the boy didn’t answer, and finally his mother got embarrassed and said, ‘Oh, honey, c’mon, that’s Mister Rogers,’ and felt his head for fever. Of course, she knew who Mister Rogers was, because she had grown up with him, and she knew that he was good for her son, and so now, with her little boy zombie-eyed under his blond bangs, she apologized, saying to Mister Rogers that she knew he was in a rush and that she knew he was here in Penn Station taping his program and that her son usually wasn’t like this, he was probably just tired **Except that Mister Rogers wasn’t going anywhere.** Yes, sure, he was taping, and right there, in Penn Station in New York City, were rings of other children wiggling in wait for him, but right now his patient gray eyes were fixed on the little boy with the big sword, and so he stayed there, on one knee, until the little boy’s eyes finally focused on Mister Rogers, and” the boy “said, **‘It’s not a sword; it’s a death ray.’** ‘A death ray! Oh, honey, Mommy knew you could do it’ And so now, encouraged, Mommy said, ‘Do you want to give Mister Rogers a hug, honey?’”

Pausing the retelling of the story, I interpret what the mother was communicating to her son was **her loving affirmation of him because he had actually talked to Mr. Rogers**. Hopefully, most, if not all of us have also experienced loving affirmation from our parents and/or other loved ones. My Parents gave me my Class Ring for Graduating from UT as such a loving affirmation. If we compare that mother’s expression of her son’s belovedness to Jesus’ relationship with John the Baptist, his cousin, the one to whom he went to be baptized, then let me point out the Baptizer’s words about Jesus some time prior to his actually baptizing him were, **“He is much greater than I am; and I am not good enough even to carry his sandals.”** Then, immediately before he baptized Jesus, John said to him, **“I ought to be baptized by you and yet you have come to me!”** Those words by John indicated Jesus was indeed beloved by him, just as the mother’s compliment of her son indicated he was beloved. **Do you remember your parent or loved one indicating you were beloved?** Knowing you are beloved gives one a degree of liberation from fear of being rejected or considered unworthy or incapable of doing something of value.

Returning to the story in the Esquire article, after the mother suggested her son hug Mr. Rogers, the article's author continued, "But the boy was shaking his head no, and Mister Rogers was sneaking his face past the big sword and the armor of the little boy's eyes and whispering something in his ear — something that, while not changing his mind about the hug, made the little boy look at Mister Rogers in a new way, with the eyes of a child at last, and nod his head **yes.**"

The author of the article continued, "We were heading back to his apartment in a taxi when I asked him what he had said."

Rogers responded, "Oh, I just knew that whenever you see a little boy carrying something like that, it means that he wants to show people that he's strong on the outside. I just wanted to let him know that he was strong on the inside, too. And so that's what I told him." **"I said, 'Do you know that you're strong on the inside, too?' Maybe it was something he needed to hear."** (From the Esquire article, "Can You Say... Hero?" by Tom Junod originally published in the November 1998 issue and republished on April 6, 2017.)

What Rogers did – **making the deeper affirmation of his value** when he said that to the boy was very much like what God did when the Voice spoke to the Son of God, Jesus, during his Baptism, ***"This is My Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased."*** Since we shared in Jesus' Baptism when we were baptized, our Divine Parent has also declared us to be God's Beloved Children! While we were somewhat liberated from fear when our parents or other loved ones affirmed our belovedness, surely, we are victorious over all fear of being demeaned or rejected because God, the Creator of the Universe, has declared us **"Beloved"**!

Now that we have affirmed our trust that we are God's Beloved Children along with God's Son, Jesus Christ, **what does that mean about the way we are called to relate with one another and everyone else by our Savior and Divine Parent?** Jesus' Baptism revealed the fulfillment of our Scripture from Isaiah, ***"Here is My Servant, whom I uphold, My Chosen, in whom My Soul delights; I have put My Spirit upon him; he will bring forth Justice to the nations."***

Among the tasks we are called to fulfill is to "bring forth Justice to the nations." That raises issues of justice for refugees, peace among the nations, and basic justice for All People! How can you and I help "bring forth Justice to the nations"? Well, one thing we can do is to communicate to our elected leaders at every level that we expect them to make sure Justice is brought forth in our communities, state, nation, and world. Another action one might take is to communicate to others when discussing issues related to Justice that you are committed to "bring forth Justice to the nations".

Following God's Beloved Son, Jesus Christ's example, there is a more basic aspect to our calling as God's Beloved Children. In addition to supporting the belovedness of All People in the face of attempts by others to bully and dominate the less powerful or those, who are different from themselves, we are called to **demonstrate and declare our recognition of the Belovedness of All People as God's Children** in the way we relate with all the people with whom we interact.

Unfortunately, there are many people in the world, including the United States, who believe it is OK for them to seek to ridicule and reject other persons. It is especially regrettable that some groups of self-professing Christians believe God wants them to cast out and demean specific types of persons, even though God sent the Beloved Son of God, Jesus Christ, to reveal and prove to All People God's Forgiveness, Invitation for the New Relationship with God, New Life of Agape Love, Justice for All, and Welcome into God's Kingdom. **So, let's treat All People as God's Beloved Children.**

Further Good News is, when we share this Way of Jesus Christ with others, we serve as God's Agents of the Divine Parent's Agape Love for All People and many will respond with Joy, Liberation from fear, and a Transformed Life of Agape Love! **Trust you are God's Beloved Child. Live as a Beloved Child of God and share the Good News, so others will also believe and trust they are God's Beloved Children.** Amen.