

Epiphany 1, Year B
Mark 1: 4-12
January 11, 2008

Trinity Episcopal Church
Sonoma, California

Beloved of God:
A Sermon Preached by the Rev. Susan Allison-Hatch

Sometimes there is a kernel of truth in the scripture so important that everything else falls by the wayside. So it is today. Today I ask you to focus with me on one thing and one thing only—the words Jesus hears as he comes up from the waters of baptism.

“You are my son; the Beloved; with you I am well-pleased.”

What God says to Jesus, God says to all of God’s children—to you, to me, to everybody. We are all God’s beloved. Every single one of us. All of the time.

Beloved of God—not for what we do or who we are or what we look like or how much money we have or how many things we have accumulated or the degrees we’ve earned or even the good deeds we have done—we are the beloved of God simply because we are God’s children.

Cranky, annoyed, downright grumpy—beloved of God. Afraid, confused, anxious—beloved of God. Guilty, ashamed, embarrassed—beloved of God.

Palestinian, Israeli, Muslim, Christian or Jew—Beloved of God. The boy shot at the BART station and the man accused of shooting him—Beloved of God. Those who see the world as we do and those who don’t—all beloved of God

People who want to push the boundaries of worship, people who want things as they have always been—all beloved of God. Those with whom we agree and those with whom we disagree—beloved of God. Those whose company we enjoy, those who drive us nuts, those who make us really mad—Beloved of God.

All of us beloved of God all of the time.

All of us welcomed, accepted and embraced just as we are.

All of us gathered at God’s welcome table.

All of us beloved of God.

Each year on the Sunday following Epiphany we celebrate the Baptism of Jesus. We hear a version of his Baptism in the river Jordan. And we remember our own baptism as we reaffirm our baptismal covenant.

Each year we each hear those words in a different way for the conditions of our lives and of our world are always changing. What remains constant is that we, and all who share this planet with us, are beloved of God. That never changes.

Today, I hear the words, “You are my child; the Beloved; with you I am well-pleased” and I find myself wondering “What would life look like if we lived from this place—from this sense of being deeply loved by God—all of the time? How would our lives be different?”

Surely they wouldn’t be lives without pain or grief or hardship. All of that was part of Jesus’ life from the moment he heard those words, “You are my Son; the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.” Remember the wilderness for that’s where he went right after his baptism; remember the Cross for that’s where he died.

Surely they wouldn’t be lives without scorn or rejection. That, too, was part of Jesus’ life. Remember what his family said of him—“he has gone out of his mind”—and remember how the disciples fled when they came for him in the Garden of Gethsemane.

Of course there are times of grief and pain and hardship, times of scorn and rejection in all our lives. Wilderness times. We can’t avoid them. They are part of life. They come with living from that place of deep connectedness with God and with one another. But when we live in confidence that we are, indeed, beloved of God, the wilderness takes on a different hue. We see the angels ministering to us there. And we, in turn, minister to others.

At its core life lived from the place of knowing oneself and all of creation as beloved of God is one of solidarity and service—solidarity with all of God’s beloved children all of the time. No matter who we are or what we do or how much money we make or how kind we are or even how we worship God. A life of solidarity with and service to all of God’s beloved—in our grief, in our pain, in our fear, in our hopes, in our disappointments and in our joy. The life Jesus leads. The life of discipleship.

This is the life our baptismal covenant calls us to.

The life of the beloved of God. Let us live boldly from that place—seeing and serving one another as the beloved children that we are.

