

Luke 3:15-17, 21-22

Well Pleased

How messy is your life? The first place you may go to in your mind is that junk drawer that has endless bits and tools and paper that you have to rummage through if you are looking for that something you think you threw in there. In my home the junk drawer is pretty manageable, but we have a bedroom that we turned into my home office and somehow that becomes the place to put stuff that needs to find a home, from the vacuum cleaner to unfinished scrap book projects, to dead batteries, and Ken's stack of bookwork that he avoids. Some will laugh, we even have an accordion nicely stored in a case in the closet in that room. Just over ten years ago I thought I would take the time to learn how to play, turns out not! This latest round of restrictions on our movements has inspired us to get the room back into shape as that is where most of my work is happening from right now. The organizing and clean up feels good!

Then there is the garage. I don't even know where to begin with that story! Suffice it to say that it is filled with the many items Ken needs to do his work, so I get it, but every so often we hire a young man to help Ken get through the clutter at the end of a job just so he can walk through the shop again.

Not sure where your disorganization, clutter or even hoarding might be going on in your life, but few of us totally get away from it. It is even more difficult when that messiness, that disorganization, that clutter or hoarding is happening in our lives, I mean our personal interior life, not the one that every one else observes, but the messy life that goes on in your heart, mind, and spirit. Granted, what is going on in with our disorganization, clutter, or hoarding might be a reflection of the inside, might even be a cry for help, but in this moment let's take a look inside.

Some live with the messiness of childhood trauma. You may not have been accepted as the LGBTQI+ beautiful child you are. You may have been a child, young adult, or adult who has been beaten or mentally and emotionally attacked by someone so close to you that you still live with the scars. If you have some similarities to me, you would have experienced being molested by young boys and older men who for some reason thought it was okay to touch and explore my body without recognizing the harm or in most cases not even caring about the harm. And I was too afraid and insecure along with a whole myriad of other emotions to know what to do about it.

Maybe your messiness is because you harmed others through your rage, your ego, your desire from more and more of whatever...power, money, substances, stuff. The ways humanity has to harm others and the reasons for it far exceed the time I have to explore it here, but what I am attempting to say is that we are all broken. Each of us has

harmed, has sinned, has fallen short of our calling as image bearers of God. Each of us has been harmed by another who has sinned and fallen short of their calling as an image bearer of God. This has been the case since humankind began. This is not unique to our generation it is why Jesus the Son was sent to live a human life in the first place.

We have just come through Christmas, our celebration of God come in the flesh through Jesus to us. Today's reading was about the baptism of Jesus. Now to back track a little. One might wonder why Jesus, the one we know and celebrate as the Son of God, might be going to another human being and getting baptized. Particularly, to be baptized by John the Baptist in that time was to mean that you were repenting of your sin. Yet Jesus was not sinful. Jesus was God in the flesh. Baptism with water is generally a recognition, a reminder, that in our living we can make choices that bring life to ourselves and others or we bring about a kind of death, living in a way that robs ourselves and others of joy, hope, love, and relationship. Water cleanses and refreshes. Baptism indicates that we desire to reject that we bring death to our living and instead embrace wholeness of body, mind, and spirit, reconciling ourselves and others in families, in community, in relationship.

Jesus didn't need any of this, yet he was baptised. Jesus came to live as we might live, to know what it means to be fully human. It may be that Jesus took himself to John to be baptized to acknowledge his and our humanity. Dr. Derek Weber writes in the preaching notes for this series,

Jesus went to John to be baptized because he was entering into this messy world that we live in. All of us are born into a world not of our making – a world we can barely understand at the best of times, a world we cannot explain at the worst of times, a world that needs repentance, which is a corporate need as much as an individual one. Jesus strode into the river to be buried up to the neck in the sin of the world, and then to rise to the Spirit. He didn't approve of the brokenness of this world, but he embraced it; he made it his, and he carried it with him, like a chip on the shoulder, like a pack on his back; he carried it all the way to the cross.¹

This is to say that Jesus gets it, which means God understands the burden, the hurt, the harm, the pain, the suffering of and in our lives.

In this moment of baptism at the start of Jesus' ministry, no one yet knew what it would mean to call Jesus the Son of God. Jesus will spend the next three years teaching about that, healing, and bringing light and life into the world then and even now.

¹ Rev. Dr. Derek Weber, Director of Preaching Ministries. Discipleship Ministries. <https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/worship-planning/love-never-ends-being-the-body-of-christ/epiphany-baptism-of-the-lord-year-c-lectionary-planning-notes/epiphany-baptism-of-the-lord-year-c-preaching-notes> Accessed January 8, 2022.

In this moment of baptism as Jesus was praying, at the start of his ministry, “the heaven was opened, and the Holy Spirit descended upon Jesus in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, ‘You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.’” (Luke 3:22)

A moment where God the Father, Jesus the Son, and the Holy Spirit came together to witness to the world that God was and is present. Now you might have noticed that in the account of Jesus’ baptism in the Gospel of Luke, we hardly noticed what Jesus is up to, there is so much else going on. In fact, we are not even given the details of the baptism itself except after the fact when Luke writes, “Now when all the people were baptized, and when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying” ...it might seem to be a rather regular day at the river Jordan. Yet John begins this whole story with elephant in the room. He is not the Messiah, John baptizes with water, but one who is more powerful than he is coming. That someone will baptize people with the Holy Spirit and fire!

That someone was Jesus. We can’t tell from the scripture whether others recognized Jesus with them, we don’t even know who for sure witnessed the dove or heard the voice come from heaven. Remember the gospels were not written as an exact word for word in the moment report. The scriptures are the accounts of those who had told their stories to others as they tried to understand and live out a life in the spirit of Jesus after he died on the cross.

Someone at some point shared what happened at the Jordan River on this day when Jesus came to be baptized and once Jesus was baptized and then praying, the heaven opened and the Holy Spirit came as a dove and a voice spoke from heaven saying “You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.” Words of love and affirmation. Words that said you are my child, you are loved, and I am pleased with you.

These are words that we too get to claim as followers of Christ, really just as human beings in the world; we are children of God, we are loved, and with us God is pleased.

We are not perfect, we are sinful, we are troubled, we make mistakes daily in how we treat ourselves and others, but because of Christ, because of the birth, the baptism, the living, the dying, and the spirit of Jesus still with us today, we can know and trust that God loves us. This is one of the things that sets Christianity apart from all others; God loved, God loves us so much that he came in the flesh, in Jesus to bring us life. This God sacrificed for us.

This is how much you are loved. You are not loved because you can earn God’s love, or be good enough for God’s to love you, but because God first loved you enough to say here, you are forgiven, in baptism and in life I am with you. I promise to be here even when you get it wrong, when it gets messy, when you are hurt or when you are doing the hurting, just keep returning to me, know that you are forgiven and work to stop the harm.

You are a child of God, you are loved, with you God is well-pleased. Take hold of this. Take hold of the forgiveness and love offered, and live your life in the spirit of Jesus, fully loved. Then, be the light that others need in the world to find that same love and forgiveness so they too may know that they are a child of God, that God loves them, and is well-pleased with them just because they are. Amen.