

1/9/2022

God believes in you.

I have called you by name you are mine. When you pass through the waters I will be with you. Amen.

When I was in my mid-20s, I moved across the country from my parents. In part this was an exciting statement of independence. I packed up my Ford Escort and drove more than 1,000 miles from Houston to Charlotte, North Carolina. Granted, I was moving close to cousins, aunts and uncles, but it felt independent - and more important, I thought it made me look independent.

In my new city, I found a job, got a place to live, connected with college buddies, and made new friends. I felt like I was becoming the adult me. The real me who was different from the old me, leaving behind the me from high school, college, and living in my parents' house.

After a couple of years though, I hit a rough patch. My job was unfulfilling and the company was being bought out. I had broken up with a boyfriend and felt lonely. I was not going out with my friends as much, not even my roommate.

At one low point, I called my mom to complain about my life. She listened to me say how I was the least interesting person in my friend group, I was no fun, my life was not going in the direction I wanted. I felt lost.

My mom could have offered advice on how to get a different job, or lambasted my friends for making me feel like an outsider. Instead, she said, "But you've always been so fun and funny. What happened to that Mary?"

That got my attention. She reminded me who I was.

She reminded me that I was known - that even when I forgot myself and felt lost from my dreams and ideals, or even my quirks and practical jokes, there were people who knew me and could call me back to myself. My mom believed in me.

It worked. I did remember. My mood lightened and I got back in touch with the “me” I had forgotten. My journey to become a new adult Mary circled around to remembering the person I already was.

I think about that incident when I consider the baptism of Jesus which we observe today, and especially when we celebrate the baptisms in this congregation.

Baptism is rightly a time when we focus on our commitment to Jesus and when we articulate our belief in a loving God. It's right there in the liturgy -

We renounce evil, we accept Jesus.

We recite a covenant affirming our belief in God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit.

And right there near the end of the Baptismal Covenant we admit that there will be times when we fall into sin. And we promise to repent and return to the Lord. And that is the part that reminds me of losing myself and being called back to myself by my Mom.

Whether you are baptized as an adult, a child or as an infant, there are times when you will inevitably forget who you are and whose you are. You will drift away from your beliefs in the Creator of heaven and earth, your faith in the crucified Christ, your reliance on the Spirit that binds us.

At some point, the apostles' teaching and fellowship, the breaking of the bread, and the prayers will no longer feel like a place and time where you encounter the Holy.

And you might ask yourself, what's the point? Am I a failure for not believing hard enough? Or are these beliefs just fake news?

It is at times like these that the words of Isaiah are like a call from Mom:

Thus says the Lord,
he who created you O Jacob, he who formed you, O
Israel:
Do not fear, for I have redeemed you;
I have called you by name you are mine.

God is in the water of baptism before we pray over it.
God is in the prayers and creeds before we say them.
Before you believed in God, God believed in you.

I learned something interesting this week about the word
“believe.” It comes from the same root as the word “belove.”
There is a relationship between believing and loving.
That makes belief more than an assent to an idea. It makes belief
holding something precious.
God believes in you, God loves you.

And that belovedness, that belief, goes all the way back to the
beginning and stretches across time.

Listen to the Thanksgiving we say over the water in our baptism
liturgy:

We thank you, Almighty God, for the gift of water. Over it the
Holy Spirit moved in the beginning of creation. Though it
you led the children of Israel out of their bondage in Egypt
into the land of promise. In it your Son Jesus received the
baptism of John...

In baptism we are not finding God.

In baptism, we are joining the God who created, knows, and loves us.

In baptism, we are not writing the story of our own coming to faith.

In baptism we are entering a story of salvation that already has a beginning, middle, and ending in Jesus Christ.

In baptism, we are accepting our place in the love story between God and creation.

In the course of our faith journeys, we will all ask, at one time or another:

Who am I?

Where do I belong?

What makes me worthy?

And in those times when we feel insignificant or troubled, baptism reminds us that God gives us identity and value. The way we see ourselves is not the way God sees us.

One of the things I love most about our baptismal liturgy is that it includes all of us - not just the one being baptized.

The words we say together are a renewal, a reminder of who we are and whose we are.

They are a phone call from Mom calling us back to ourselves.

God chose you. God believes in you.

You can enter baptism because God loved you first.

In Isaiah, God says to the people of Israel, who have strayed and lost their way (and you can read along, but this is a paraphrase):

Don't be afraid! I know who you are and what you've done. I know how hard the world can be. When the waters are rough, when the fires burn, I am in it with you. I've saved you before and I continue to save you now. You are precious to me.

And by “you” I mean all of you.

Today, the church remembers the baptism of Jesus, who joined us in the rough waters of our world. When Jesus was baptized, the God of creation entered the waters God created. When Jesus was baptized, the God of salvation invited us into the story that includes rescue after rescue, reminder after reminder that we are known and loved.

Today around the world and here at St. Mark’s, some of our very own will enter those same waters in baptism.

When you hear the the story and participate in the welcoming of all God’s baptized, I hope you will remember that when your faith waivers, when you forget who you are, God is always calling you back to yourself. You are beloved.

God believes in you.

Amen.