

Chris Murphy

January 13th, 2021

Scripture: Mark 1: 4-11 NRSV

Sermon Title: The Beloved Baptism of Jesus

Prayer...

Introduction:

This morning I want us to explore the baptism of Jesus and our own experience of baptism, but I know our hearts and minds are on the events of this last week, so I want to thoughtfully reflect on how being the beloved of God connects to our call as Christians during this season of our nation. I believe the heart of baptism is receiving the good news that we are beloved of God. As we hear that personal good news and truly receive it, we are empowered by the Holy Spirit to share God's love with the world.

Two years ago, my wife Karen was invited to attend a special conference in Washington DC. Karen had published her dissertation and

her book was being considered for an award, so we flew to Maryland to attend the conference. Being history buffs and faithful citizens of the United States, we took time to tour many of the historic buildings of Washington DC, including the Lincoln Memorial and the U.S. Capitol.

Our experience of visiting Washington DC had a lasting impact on all of us. I think it gave Karen, Cate, Chiara, and I a deeper appreciation of the importance of democracy and the hope of a nation where all people could be treated with equality.

When I was at the Lincoln Memorial, I took time to remember that Martin Luther King Jr. gave his “I have a Dream Speech” on that holy ground. I also saw the memorials for the military veterans who gave their lives in war. The U.S. Capitol reminded me that we benefit from having both the House of Representatives and the Senate. We benefit from having the Supreme Court. Despite our history full of brokenness, the resilience of the United States and its journey for greater rights for women and people of color through voting laws and other efforts is a

worthy enterprise that can give hope not only to this nation but to the world.

In our story of the baptism of Jesus, we read that the prophet known as John the Baptist is the one who baptizes Jesus. Jesus deeply loved his relative John and humbled himself to be baptized. Jesus and John were very close and had a common mission to proclaim the message of God's truth, justice, forgiveness, and love.

When Jesus was baptized by John, little did he know or maybe he knew all too well what struggles would await him. People who speak out for the truth of God are often treated poorly. Jesus was embraced by many for a time but hated by others. Jesus brought a message of love for all people even one's enemy. He had a special heart for marginalized people, like children, women, the sick, the Samaritans, and others. He wanted everyone to know that God loved them and he invited his followers to be a beloved community dedicated to loving one another.

Martin Luther King Jr. talked about the beloved community in his speeches and writings. As we know, King was assassinated in 1968 for preaching a message of love and nonviolence and because of his willingness to speak out about the problem of racism and the dangers of war.

In 1968, following her husband's death Coretta Scott King helped start The King Center as a memorial to her husband to promote the work of nonviolence and love. According to the King Center,

“Dr. King's Beloved Community is a global vision in which all people can share in the wealth of the earth. In the Beloved Community, poverty, hunger and homelessness will not be tolerated because international standards of human decency will not allow it. Racism and all forms of discrimination, bigotry and prejudice will be replaced by an all-inclusive spirit of sisterhood and brotherhood.”

Here are a couple of quotes from the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. about the Beloved Community.

“The aftermath of nonviolence is the creation of the beloved community, so that when the battle is over, a new relationship comes into being between the oppressed and the oppressor.”

“But the end is reconciliation; the end is redemption; the end is the creation of the beloved community. It is this type of spirit and this type of love that can transform opposers into friends. The type of love that I stress here is not eros, a sort of esthetic or romantic love; not philia, a sort of reciprocal love between personal friends; but it is agape which is understanding goodwill for all men. It is an overflowing love which seeks nothing in return. It is the love of God working in the lives of men. This is the love that may well be the salvation of our civilization.”

from "The Role of the Church in Facing the Nation's Chief Moral Dilemma," 1957

Sadly, the riots at the U.S. Capitol that led to the death of now five people and the injuring of many others as well as vandalism to a sacred historical site, show us all too clearly that the United States has a long way to go to fully embody the beloved community.

And yet that is the goal of this nation and other nations that seek equality and love for all people.

How are we to connect this to our baptism and the calling of the Church?

When Jesus was baptized he heard the message, You are my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased. Being beloved of God was foundational to the ministry of Jesus. As he came up from the water and heard that message from his Father in Heaven, Jesus also was anointed by the Holy Spirit and empowered to do his ministry. The

power of his miracles came from the Holy Spirit and flowed from this love from the Father.

Today, I want you to remember your baptism. When I was baptized I was thirteen years old and it signified a new commitment to follow Jesus with my life. Being baptized helped me experience God's love in a special way and also opened the door for me to be a member in my church. In my baptism, I felt like I was growing up and becoming more serious about my faith and my desire to deepen my relationship to God. Baptism helped me feel love from my church.

If you have not yet been baptized, let me know and we would love to baptize you at this church. When we baptize people at our church it is a way to express God's love and to welcome people into membership in this congregation. The Presbyterian Church U.S.A. supports baptism of both infants, children, and adults of all ages. When infants are baptized it is an expression of the grace offered to us in Jesus, who chooses us for relationship even before we are ready to say yes to that offer. When

we are baptized at an older age, we get to choose baptism as an expression of our commitment to love and follow Jesus and to serve Christ through the beloved community of the church.

I hope the pain of this last week reminds us that the role of followers of Jesus and others is to embody the beloved community. We are to come together across political spectrums and love God and one another. We are to work for bi-partisan concerns such as equality for all people, embracing of all ethnicities, ending racism, affirming women, and an end to violent extremism. We can work for nonviolence and still support the military and law enforcement as they provide protection for citizens. We need to confront the historic racism that resulted in people storming into the U.S. Capitol with confederate flags waving.

When tragedy happens like last week, faithful followers of Jesus call for a renewed commitment to love and prayer. Let us pray for our political leaders. Let us pray for a peaceful transition of power and wisdom for Joe Biden and Kamela Harris as they take over leadership of this nation.

May we create a country together that our children can be proud of, which includes being willing to speak up for the vulnerable and to thoughtfully and prayerfully challenge any powers that undermine the love of the Gospel. Let us be the Church and let us join with other citizens of other faiths or who do not identify with a particular faith and work together for unity and an end to the hatred that is harming our nation.

By the power of the Holy Spirit and God's Agape love, may we embody the beloved community.

Please pray with me....

Lord Jesus, when you were baptized you heard words of love from your Father. May we hear these words of love from you and let them empower us to love others, even our enemies. Help us to come together as the United States of America. May our democracy grow stronger not weaker and may we see an end to the racism and hatred

that plague our nation. We need you Jesus. Have mercy upon us. Give us strength by your Holy Spirit. In the Name of Jesus We Pray...AMEN.