

Luke 3:15-17, 21-22

Here we are in the season of Epiphany...so what does that mean...Epiphany, by definition, means a sudden manifestation or perception of the essential nature or meaning of something...it's an intuitive grasp of reality or an illuminating discovery! And today we have Jesus' Baptism and something is revealed here.

So let's get to it...the first thing that seems odd about this is why would Jesus need Baptizing... a cleansing from sin? He had no sin right?!

See Jesus presented himself for baptism as an act of solidarity with us all...an entire world full of sinners.

Jesus joins with everyone... all of those who had been broken by the wear and tear of this selfish world... and had all but given up on themselves and their God.

When the line of the downtrodden formed in the hope we all have of new beginnings... through a return to God being called for by John here Jesus joins with us!

Repent means to turn around...to turn back to God...and as John the Baptist calls them...Jesus is there with them...WITH Them! Emmanuel means God WITH us!

At His Baptism... Jesus identifies Himself with the damaged and broken people who desperately needed God to show up in their lives.

See the kingdom of man made their lives hard and they needed hope for something better and greater than their own circumstances.

Do we also identify ourselves with the broken and those in need of God's presence in their lives...don't we also yearn for God to show up and be with us too?

Too many times we... and the church feel like we need to have it all together before coming to God. The church may have all the right words as we declare ourselves a hospital for sinners and refugees... but too often we send the exact opposite message... that only respectable successful all together folks are the ones we need here.

Time and time again people who encounter difficulties or challenges in their lives actually will leave the church to seek help from caregivers or others... only to return to the church after they feel more respectable...more like “church going” people.

But Jesus continually identified himself with sinners. He identified himself with those who were broken and those who truly need God.

We are all looking for God...we all need God... let's face it some of us feel like we have our act together...and some of us may think we have a lot of the answers...but it is in that knowing... even that arrogance... that we often fail others and ourselves...Because when we look to ourselves for all that is right in the world then we become myopic tunnelvision...we become egocentric and we sin.

We believe that the world and others should think... and act... and feel like we do... and that can't be further from the truth.

A lot of the division in this world is caused by people or groups of people that think they have all the answers! See when we are broken or lost ...we know it don't we...the downtrodden always know who they are.

So, whether we have it all together or not...make no mistake...we all need God! Just those of us on our backs see it much quicker...the marginalized who are not benefiting by the current systems of power definitely know they need something better.

They definitely need God...they know it! On the other hand, the self-righteous... not so much...Why would you need God if you think you already have it all...just say tanks and move on...

This year we are reading Luke's gospel and it's in this Gospel that you have the parable of the Prodigal Son...or more appropriately its' the parable of the two lost sons.

In the story the son who loses everything knows that he's strayed from His Father... while the other son doesn't recognize that he has also strayed from His Father too...and the Father loves them both in spite of both their actions or inactions.

Luke's gospel emphasizes this fact ...that those who are lost know it and that those who think they have it all together are also lost although they have a much harder time recognizing that they also need God too.

We all need a relationship with God...and so those of us who have much in this world need to be especially wary.

It is upon this day... Jesus's baptism... that we see where Jesus's and God's heart truly lie.

And so today we must ask ourselves, do we as a church depend upon the power of the Holy Spirit for our connection to God... or do we look upon our own power and rituals? We need to be careful!

We know that Jesus chose for His disciples the nobodies...those who didn't have it all together...those that didn't have all the answers...They weren't the best and brightest...these guys didn't have credentials or fancy titles.

They were not people in power...and these are the people that Jesus chose as to follow Him...people who knew... without a doubt... that they needed Jesus in their life to understand and be closer to God.

Through identifying with sinners, in the waters of baptism, Jesus is now claimed as God's own son...the beloved... one that reflects and points to the heart of our Creator.

This powerful affirmation from God sustains Jesus through His upcoming temptation and then through the trials of His life and ministry here in the Kingdom of man.

Do we also know here that God claims us as children... and do we also know that we are also beloved in bringing God's love to all people...

We too need to hear this affirmation... You are beloved...and we too need to hear this from each other. As humans we need to know that we are loved...every human on this planet yearns to be loved and to love! Love is our default before the ways of man take over and we are told and taught differently.

Every human being on this planet needs to hear those words!

You are my child whom I love...I love You! Children should hear it often... spouses should hear it...neighbors should hear it...and our church members should hear it...I Love You!

If you want to know what ails our world...if you want to identify the root cause for much of our dysfunction in our communities and families... it is from this pain...when people do not know that they are in fact - loved!

Luke uses very few words to share with us the baptism of our Lord... but those few words lead us to joy... knowing that we are loved and that Jesus identifies with all of us as children of the living God!

It is also noteworthy to add that John the Baptist...like many in Israel saw God's coming as a way to separate the so called good from the bad...God's Chosen from everyone else...Jews from us gentiles.

John saw God as a judge (like some of us do)...calling out Israel's religious leaders who had sold out their faith to Rome. He called them to an accounting...an accounting which I'm sure most of the population would have been very much in agreement with...like today.

And yet we know that when Jesus arrives and is called by God it is not a call to judgment and punishment...but rather it is a call to love... as a parent loves their child... it is a call rooted in this deep abiding love!

And throughout the gospels we can see this dichotomy... where the people want justice and judgement... and Jesus continually chooses love and mercy to all God's children instead of choosing to love some while excluding others.

The other thing to note in Luke's gospel is that Jesus prays a lot...even right here at His baptism. Jesus is praying... and He prays throughout all of Luke's gospel. This denotes His close and ongoing relationship with His Father.

See communication and relationship are a big part of loving.

And being able to communicate with someone you trust...your needs, your wants... your dreams. Notice at the beginning of this paragraph the people came filled with expectation and were questioning in their hearts concerning John...They were indeed looking for something!

The people had a yearning... a yearning and an expectation of a better life... but they were looking for John to fill that role.

Instead, Jesus shows up and shows us by example that only God can fill that role... and also that God fills that role in relationship! Jesus is accepted by God as God's beloved child... and there is prayer... there is communication and there is a loving relationship here!

It's always ever been about a relationship with God...here with us! God is not over us or for us rather Jesus is Emmanuel... God with us...God with us as a loving parent in relationship.

A parent and child... in bonds of love so strong... that each of us who has children know exactly what this looks and feels like. The people came to John looking for hope and what they witnessed through Jesus' baptism was that God was in fact already with them...and that they were loved as well.

Jesus chooses to be with us not to be above us or to be better than us... Jesus doesn't forgo the need to be baptized...instead Jesus is here with us in order that we too can have a relationship with our heavenly Father

This is our first week in epiphany...so what's the first epiphany here?

What is revealed here? The good news above all is that you are loved...beloved...that you are a son and daughter of God... that Jesus is in fact with you and that through prayer we too can have a loving relationship with God.

You are all worthy of this...you are all loved...the Spirit of God is alive and well... and all you need to do is open yourself up to experience God with you right here and now...and pray.

That's the epiphany...now go out and proclaim this love to others... to your parents...to your children...to the significant people in your life...to anyone who will listen.

Tell them all that they are loved... tell them that you love them ...and tell them that the God and Father of All loves them so very deeply.

Sow the seeds of this love in our world... and watch what happens...watch what grows from that love...that's your epiphany today!

Your faithful servant,

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