“This is my Beloved”

A sermon given by the Rev. Rachel Wildman

January 8th, 2017

Scripture: Matthew 3:13-17

When I began as a chaplain intern in the hospital a number of summers ago, my visits with people were studded with what should have been slightly awkward silences, but more often were VERY awkward responses from me. When given the immense gift of another’s vulnerability, I too often felt that I should provide an answer, an analysis at the least—at the “best” (that categorization, itself, to the head banging of my supervisor I am certain), an inspiring theological framework from which they could make meaning from their suffering. Go on…it’s fine to be feeling great relief that you did not end up in Beverly Hospital during the summer of 2013 for this reason, above myriad others, I’m sure.

By the end of the summer, I, very thankfully for all involved, had realized the err of my thinking, and had learned what I have experienced so far as the most powerfully transformative pastoral and personal words to the vulnerability of another, and of ourselves. “You are God’s beloved, and in you, God is well pleased.” In the arresting, awkward silence of doubt, fear, anger, and exhaustion, the divine truth “You are God’s beloved, and in you, God is well pleased,” even if not uttered allowed but simply repeated again and again in the quiet of my heart, infused the space with a gentleness that melted away nearly all barriers to God’s healing respite. The fact that this gentle truth could accomplish such immensity, could tunnel to the depths of the one being claimed by its certainty, was astounding to me, until I experienced it for myself.

Someone said it to me, very recently—I wasn’t in the midst of a personal crisis or particularly stressed out. Yet, even still, in the middle of the intensity that is so often just living life, those words arrested me. I paused, and then burst into tears. I wasn’t crying out of sadness…I wasn’t crying out of joy….I was crying as an outpouring of the wave of peace and gratitude which overtook me—so tenderly forceful—a paradox I still can’t quite wrap my head around. That peace emptied out all that was in me except that single, complete truth of my belovedness…the gentleness of those words filled my head, reverberating off each other in a symphony of “you are my beloved daughter, who brings me great joy.” I was connected, even if only momentarily, to the essence of who I am—the single determining factor of my entire being—that I am God’s beloved daughter who brings God great joy.

The truth of our identity has been made out to seem as if it can only come to us in fiery rebellion (see adolescence for many of us), that it’s heavy and fierce and uncompromising. It perhaps isn’t all that surprising, though, for we who know God as love, that the truth of our identity, the very core of who each of us is, comes to us in the gentle, yet powerful, whisper of our belovedness, and the warming wonder that we DO bring joy to God.

Henri Nouwen, in his book *The Life of the Beloved[[1]](#footnote-1)*, talks about “claiming our belovedness as our core truth”…Structuring our whole life and purpose around this truth for ourselves, and for others. When our indisputable belovedness is the core identity from which we live, gratitude becomes our most powerful emotion—the emotion from which we approach conflict, attempt new things, see the resources around us. Paradoxically, when we claim our own identity as God’s beloved, we are freed up to live for others. In this process of owning just how loved we are, we find ourselves, we find others, and we find Christ. In the words of Thomas Merton, “This discovery of ourselves is always a losing of ourselves—a death and a resurrection. ‘Your life is hidden with Christ in God.’ The discovery of ourselves in God, and of God in ourselves, by a charity that also finds other men in God with ourselves is, therefore, not the discovery of ourselves, but of Christ.”[[2]](#footnote-2) Living in the truth of just how much joy we bring to God, is, it seems to me, quite possibly Salvation.

Try it sometime…simply pray “you are God’s beloved, and in you God is well pleased” in the presence of another’s vulnerability…if the moment feels right, whisper it gently…and see what happens. Whisper it to your spouse, your children, your parents, your friends, your stressed out co-workers, your struggling home-bound elderly neighbor, yourself. “You are God’s beloved, in whom God is well pleased.”

Salvation—a fulfillment of our belovedness and that of every other—comes tenderly powerful, and powerfully tender. All praise be to God. AMEN.

1. Henri Nouwen, *Life of the Beloved: Spiritual Living in a Secular World*, The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1992, pp. 27-40. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Thomas Merton, *No Man Is an Island*, Harcourt, Inc., 1955, p. xv. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)