

## Pastor Colleen's Sermon of January 10, 2010

**Grace, Peace and Mercy be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen**

A Lutheran minister named Roy Lloyd once interviewed Mother Teresa.

And one of the questions he asked her was, "What's the biggest problem in the world today?"

And she answered, without hesitation,

"The biggest problem in the world today is that we draw the circle of our family too small. We need to draw it larger every day."

With all that is evil and wrong in this world today it would be easy to answer that question with a hundred different events.

She could have named poverty, homelessness, hunger, disease, war... the list is unfortunately endless.

But what makes her answer so memorable is she is saying that the problem is not With the world.

The problem is with us.

We need to see more people as our neighbor than we are currently doing.

We need to expand the circle of our family.

We need to stop letting the world decide who we call family and start pulling more people into our lives.

In our gospel for this morning we have the story of Jesus baptism

And in Jesus' baptism I think we are getting the example of exactly what Mother Teresa was saying.

In his baptism Jesus included US in his righteousness.

He identified with humanity,

with our need to be cleansed,

and our need to be made pure.

If you have been baptized you have been drawn,

By Jesus' baptism,

Into the circle of God's family.

In baptism we are adopted as children of God and marked with the cross of Christ forever.

Baptism is this fantastic invitation from God to know us intimately and closely,

so closely that we are called son or daughter,

we are called beloved,

and we become family.

This morning, in Luke's version of Jesus' baptism, we hear,

"Now when all the people were baptized, **and** when Jesus also had been baptized... THEN

A voice came from heaven and said, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased."

And so it is with all of us.

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When we are baptized we become daughters and sons of God and God is pleased with us as well. In the same way that I as a parent am pleased with my daughters. I was not just pleased with them when they were small children, Still as they are growing into young women I continue to be "well pleased" with them. As a parent... delighting in one's children never goes away... nothing diminishes this.

And so it is when you and I are baptized. God looks down at you and me and says, "This is my beloved son, this is my beloved daughter in whom I am well pleased." In our baptism we are immersed into God's family and we are called beloved.

And being God's beloved is nothing short of miraculous and transformational... It reminds me of a story that was told by Janet Wolf, who was the Pastor at Hobson United Methodist Church in Nashville, Tennessee Janet tells the story of a remarkable woman named Fayette.

It seems that years ago, a woman named Fayette found her way to Hobson. Fayette lived with mental illness and lupus and without a home. She joined the new member class. During the class they were having a conversation about baptism and Janet called baptism, "this holy moment when we are named by God's grace with such power it won't come undone," and this statement especially grabbed Fayette's attention as she was not yet baptized. Then Janet tells of how, during the class, Fayette would ask again and again, "And when I'm baptized, I am...?" And the class learned to respond, "Beloved, precious child of God, and beautiful to behold." And Fayette would yell out... 'Oh, yes!' and then they would go back to their discussion."

Finally, the day of Fayette's baptism came and this is how Janet describes it: "Fayette went under, came up spluttering, and cried, 'And now I am...?' And we all sang, 'Beloved, precious child of God, and beautiful to behold.' 'Oh, yes!' she shouted as she danced all around the fellowship hall."

Then two months later, Janet received a phone call that Fayette had been brutally attacked and was in the hospital. So Janet immediately went to the hospital. She said she could see her from a distance, pacing back and forth. And when she got to the door, she heard, 'I am beloved....' And then Fayette turned, saw Janet, and said, 'I am beloved, precious child of God, and....' At that moment she caught sight of herself in the mirror—hair sticking up, blood and tears streaking her face, dress torn, dirty, and, she started again, 'I am beloved, precious child of God, and....' She looked in the mirror again and declared, '...and God is still working on me. If you come back tomorrow, I'll be so beautiful I'll take your breath away!'

Beloved,

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the voice from heaven had proclaimed as the baptismal waters of the Jordan rolled off Jesus' body.

Beloved,

the voice named him as he prepared to begin his public ministry.

Beloved,

spoken with such power that it would permeate Jesus' entire life and teaching.

Beloved,

he would name those he met who were desperate for healing, for inclusion, for hope.

Beloved,

echoing through the ages, continuing to name those drenched in the waters of baptism.

Fayette—beloved, precious child of God, and beautiful to behold— challenges us to ask what it means that

like her, and with her

we have been named by God's grace with such power that it won't come undone.

As we remember the Baptism of Jesus,

how will we come to grips with the fact that we, have shared in those waters

that in the sacrament of baptism and as members of the body of Christ,

we, too, are named as beloved children of God?

How will we live in such a way that others will know themselves as named by God,

beloved by God

especially those who have been given cause to think they are less than loved,

less than children of the One who created them?

Beloved. Children of God.

That's our identity.

That's our family.

We are the beloved children of God.

One family... one community of believers...

And as Jesus reminded us throughout his life and ministry

And as Mother Teresa reminds us today...

We are to widen the circle of our family.

We are to remember to welcome the lost, forgotten, and wandering into this family with the same, OH YES!! That Fayette declared as she danced around after her own baptism.

Baptism is a unique event in our lives.

And it is an event which includes everyone

And it is applied to each one equally.

Our baptismal calling leads us to be responsible for each other in the community

Our baptismal calling leads us to widen the circle of our family

Our baptismal calling leads us to be a light of hope and strength for those in Christ and those who are still searching.

In the coming days, may the waters of our baptism so cling to us that in their depths we see who we are,

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and from our depths reflect to others their true name:  
beloved, precious child of God, and beautiful to behold.  
Amen

**May the peace of God which passes all human understanding, keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen**