**Sermon 1-13-19**

**Paul Purdue preachng**

**Through Baptism - January 13, 2019**

Have you heard heaven’s voice speaking: “You are my child, my Beloved; I rejoice in you”? Do we believe the Good News that God loves us and that God loves the world?

When Jesus was baptized, Jesus was praying. Jesus was praying and heaven itself opened up. The Holy Spirit descended upon Jesus mysteriously in a form like a dove. Jesus heard heaven speak: “You are my child, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.”

When we Hear, “You are my child, my Beloved; I rejoice in you”, it changes everything.

Baptism speaks of sin and grace. Paul Tillich warns that sin and grace are difficult but inseparable concepts. Tillich describes sin as a state of separation. This separation is threefold: a separation from others, a separation from oneself, and separation from God.... (This separation) prohibits us “from losing ourselves in love”. Our state of separation means we are not capable of a great and merciful divine love towards ourselves.

Grace is mysterious and elusive. (“But) do we know what it means to be struck by grace?... Sometimes at that moment (of grace), a wave of light breaks into our darkness, and it is as though a voice were saying: "You are accepted. You are accepted, accepted by that which is greater than you, and the name of which you do not know…. Do not try to do anything now. Simply accept the fact that you are accepted!" After such an experience of grace, you may not be better than before, and you may not believe more than before. But everything is transformed.”(A transcript of Tillich’s sermon can be found at Patheos.com: You are accepted what a strange idea Paul Tillich)

Our baptismal vows acknowledge that baptism is about what God is doing in us- not what we do for God. We are “being incorporated in God’s mighty acts of salvation and given new birth by water and spirit.” But we like to work our way into heaven and earn our spiritual keep.

Oh, that our cloudy skies might break open and we might hear God’s holy whisper: “You are my child, my Beloved. You are accepted by God who is greater than you…. Simply accept the fact that you are accepted!"

Now we may think the heavenly voice is not for us, only for Jesus. Some thought it was just some rumbling thunder. How can it be that God’s amazing love finds us?  The deep love of God struck Paul down with grace, even as he breathed murderous terrorism. Grace flows from God's love not our striving. Grace transforms, Grace refuses to “count our sins against us”   (Colossians 2:13; 2 Corinthians 5:19). Let us be struck by Jesus’ startling words ,”Father forgive them, they do not know what they are doing.” Hear Heaven whisper, “Who will separate us from the love of Christ?..Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?... No! For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.” (Romans 8)

Let us pray... Lord, we come to these baptismal waters and ask for the sky to be torn open, so that the clouds of our separation from you, from each other, and from your image within us, might dissolve within your deepest grace. We ponder your love and our alienation from you, our alienation from each other, and our alienation from our very selves. Show us the places of our separation from You, from each other, and from our own souls. Help us believe the Good News that you love us and your world. We believe that Nothing can separate us from your love. Let us know that we are accepted, accepted by You, One greater than us…. Help us Accept that we are accepted, so that your deep acceptance might change everything in us. Wash us with your great love so that we might come to love ourselves, love our neighbors, and love your world.. Amen.

Jesus baptism comes in Luke 3:21. Its location matters, not for some numerology or Bible prophecy chart, but simply because Jesus’ mission begins with God speaking to Jesus, “You are my child, my Beloved; I rejoice in you.”   It all begins with Love. Baptism is not the end of faith but the beginning. Matthew places Jesus’ baptism in 3:13. Mark goes straight to the water in 1:9. Luke offers 153 verses before the baptism and another 989 verses to follow. Baptism marks the beginning of our journey into grace. There are crowds to feed, sick people needing healthcare, legalists to challenge, outcasts to embrace, disciples to forgive, and Good News to share. Grace sends us out to work as changed people. Baptism is not a fixed in time event, a rite, or magic bean that gets into heaven. The font is not a stagnant pool. We stand at the end of the dock ready to jump into life’s unfolding river with grace, hope and transformation. We hope to catch an unseen grace-filled that mysteriously moves us along.

So hear the good news and dive in. “You are my child, my Beloved;  Nothing can separate us from the love of God. We are accepted, accepted by God who is greater than us…. Accept the fact that you are accepted! And be transformed!”   And so...

We come to these waters professing a hope beyond our  words. We come embracing the Good News that God loves us and loves this world.  We come to draw closer to God and strive to live by the example of Jesus Christ.

We come confessing Jesus, trusting in grace, and longing to serve Christ as Lord.

Oh, but sinful forces seek to separate us from each other and God’s love for all. So we resist evil, injustice, and oppression. We turn away from our sin and claim God’s freedom and power to live new lives.

We enter these grace-filled waters inside Christ’s church. We come to build a community of love and forgiveness. Love requires we open the church to all people and welcome everyone with Christ-like love. Grace lets us see God working in others. So let us increase each other’s faith, confirm each other’s hope and perfect one another in love.

Help us  remember these baptismal waters are not about our doings. These waters flow from God’s grace and mercy alone. Our journey begins with grace. Grace renews us, restores us and, recreates us. So come, Almighty God, and pour your Holy Spirit into our hearts to wash away our sin, end our separation from love, clothe us in righteousness, and raise us from death, so that nourished by love’s Living Water, we might become a stream of grace, and live as faithful disciples of Jesus Christ. Amen.