



ST. LUKE IN THE FIELDS  
CELEBRATING 200 YEARS

“BELOVEDNESS”  
BAPTISM OF OUR LORD

GENESIS 1:1-5

PSALM 29

ACTS 19:1-7

MARK 1:4-11

A SERMON BY THE REV. CAROLINE STACEY  
JANUARY 10, 2021

I know many of us are still reeling after the events of this week, and the insurrection at the Capitol. Let us start as always with the gospel. We celebrate the baptism of Jesus on the *first* Sunday after Epiphany each year. The church believes Jesus' baptism is so significant that it is given central place after Jesus' birth.

God reveals to us in Jesus' baptism that Jesus' belovedness is *for* something. First, God wants to draw our focus to Jesus. God also wants Jesus to absorb his own belovedness. It is very important that Jesus takes in his own belovedness because it is the foundation for everything that comes next. Jesus is 30 and beginning his 3 years of earthly ministry. There will be some triumphs, many healings, but also hatred, mockery, betrayal, conspiracy, death. His experience of belovedness becomes so real and profound that Jesus calls God Dad, *Abba*<sup>1</sup>. His belovedness becomes Jesus' core reality and identity; it is his strength to carry on. It is his reference point in Gethsemane and on the Cross. Jesus' belovedness is both for himself and through him, Jesus' belovedness is for the transformation of the world. And so is ours. When we are folded into the love of God as all human being are - and as we are

<sup>1</sup> *Mark 14:36*

sacramentally at our baptism - we are “in God”, *en theos* (“en-thused”); not for ourselves alone but for the transformation of the world. Our baptismal calling as Christians is nothing less than to participate in God’s transformation of the world.

Turning to this week... One thing many have noted is that Trump didn’t spring from nowhere into office. 74 million people voted for him in 2020. (Or they voted for Republican ideas connected to him). We may pin the insurrection at the Capitol entirely on Trump. Please don’t misunderstand me - he is culpable and should be held accountable for his part in the shocking and tragic events of this week. But none of this could have happened if others hadn’t been hooked in. This is where our faith is a resource far beyond political commentary alone. The deeper truth is that Trump unleashes darkness already present in human hearts. He would have no power of incitement if people were not already hooked from the inside. Our faith teaches us that the most important battles are fought in the human heart. The inside is where the outside battles originate.

Recalling for a moment our spiritual ancestors in the Garden of Eden<sup>2</sup>... Theologically, the serpent would

<sup>2</sup> *Genesis ch. 3*

have had no power over Adam and Eve if they hadn't consented to let him. It's an obverse, a shadow, of the Annunciation to the Blessed Virgin Mary – it requires Mary's consent. Similarly, the serpent did not and could not force Eve or Adam to do anything. The power of the serpent as Scripture says<sup>3</sup>, lay in his subtlety, his persuasiveness in connecting to their less mature human impulses.

*The heart of man is desperately wicked*, preached reformer Jonathan Edwards<sup>4</sup> based on verses in Jeremiah. That has long been the Calvinist theology. Perhaps more accurately, the human heart is desperately vulnerable to fear. Fear is not one of the seven deadly sins but it is a cause of many of them. The Adam and Eve interaction with the serpent is the original FOMO – fear of missing out - fear that God is holding out on them some of his best gifts. “I want that”, they think.

What is it I wonder that the rioters saw as being withheld from them? Having been lied to by their leaders, the mob believe they are reclaiming an election stolen from the rightful winner. Yet underneath lies more, I think. The overwhelmingly white mob are enacting what many commentators

<sup>3</sup> *Genesis 3:1*

<sup>4</sup> *Jeremiah 17:9-10*

think got Trump elected in the first place - fear of their white privilege and automatic supremacy being eroded. Even leaving aside the whole issue of law enforcement decisions, Trump fomented the riot but the rioters were already captivated by rhetoric of grievance and anger, a violent crusade rooted in white entitlement based on skin color and ancestry.

That built-in sense of white entitlement is in turn a direct legacy of slavery in America. Underneath the insurgency and white militias is another of the poison fruits of slavery. What is unexamined in our personal and collective lives poisons the well from which we all drink. As an American citizen by choice, with a bit of an “outsider” perspective that comes from not growing up here, I am always seeking to better understand my adopted country. I think about this American wound a lot. I try to imagine what it would be like to have ancestors in my own family who owned slaves. I try to imagine what it would be like to have people delivered to you in shackles and set them to work for life with no rights and no accountability for their treatment. Most humans cannot cope with subjecting someone just like them to a life of misery and suffering, and so the slavers psychologically had to split off, to make their slaves *not* like them, only

3/5ths like them<sup>5</sup>, just over half human. That abomination was written into law. The legacy of slavery in white entitlement and structures is only beginning to be talked about, timidly, in public discussion. It is like a shameful secret hidden in plain sight. As with all secrets, even those hidden in plain sight, there are consequences when we turn away from their truth. The pain doesn't go away until it is addressed. The truth is the wealth and power of this nation was built on the backs of slaves and that is the truth from which the white rioters are ultimately running. We white people are not entitled to our privilege and we must redress the terrible injustices of the legacy of slavery. Until we deal with this festering wound of racism, the hearts of many white people will continue to be vulnerable to fear and lies that say they are being robbed of what is rightfully theirs, whether it is jobs or free and fair elections.

The good news is that the love of God does not rest until it has transformed and healed everything it touches. God doesn't leave Adam and Eve in exile. God's energy is always working towards redemption and wholeness in human lives. God can help us heal this nation and address and heal the sin of racism. Those forces of love and transformation can move

<sup>5</sup> *The Three-Fifths Clause: Article 1, Section 2 Constitution of the United States, 1788*

through *us* as they moved through Jesus.

It is very important in these days both for ourselves and for the world that we go deep into our belovedness. *You are my beloved one.* God's love for us can be our reference point at all times and in all places, as it is for Jesus. We belong to God in Christ. Let us ask God to transform our deepest fears into Light and make us bearers of the Light of Christ in the world.

AMEN

THE CHURCH OF ST. LUKE IN THE FIELDS  
487 HUDSON STREET  
NEW YORK, NY 10014

TEL: 212.924.0562

FAX: 212. 633.2098

WEBSITE: [WWW.STLUKEINTHEFIELDS.ORG](http://WWW.STLUKEINTHEFIELDS.ORG)

EMAIL: [INFO@STLUKEINTHEFIELDS.ORG](mailto:INFO@STLUKEINTHEFIELDS.ORG)