

Word for the Week



Confidently Living Out Who We Really Are

Scripture Reading: Luke 3:15-22

There once was a seed in a greenhouse looking out the window. “How I wish I were a beautiful flower like those out there,” it thought, gazing at the garden outside, “but I’m just a good-for-nothing, ugly seed.”

So, as one would expect of anything and anyone who wants to be something great, the seed began to focus its energy, think positive thoughts, and work hard as

hard as it could at becoming a beautiful flower. “When I finally make this happen, I’ll be worth something. Then, everyone will look and see my value.”

But no matter how hard it tried, nothing happened. No amount of focus, positive thinking, or effort made any difference. The seed just laid there... just a seed. “Good for nothing, that’s what I am,” it decided.

But of course, it was wrong. The gardener knew. The seed was just right, just the one the gardener wanted for her garden. Long before the seed recognized all that it already was or imagined all that it would become, the gardener saw it all in her mind’s eye. The seed didn’t need to prove anything to anyone. All it needed was to trust the gardener and in due time, according to the Gardener’s timing, live into what it was created to be.

This coming Sunday, we celebrate the Baptism of our Lord focusing on Luke’s description of the event in his third chapter. As is clear from Luke 3:23, the verse immediately following Sunday’s reading, Jesus’ baptism takes place before he begins his “work,” that is, his ministry. In other words, before Jesus ever starts preaching and teaching, calling disciples, performing signs and miracles, or offering himself as a sacrifice on the cross, the heavenly Father and the Holy Spirit make it clear that heaven is open to him, that they are with him as he ventures forward, that he is loved.

Jesus enters his ministry not to gain the Father’s love or prove himself worthy of being called the Son of God, or in the hope that he will prove himself worthy of the Holy Spirit coming to help him. Rather, Jesus enters his ministry having been assured that heaven is already open to him, that the Holy Spirit is with him, and that he is the Son of God, beloved by the Father. He goes forward into ministry simply to live out who he is with confidence in the abiding presence and love of the Father and the Spirit.

Luke tells us that when Jesus had been baptized and was praying all of this was made clear to Jesus. That clarity was crucial for Jesus as he ventured into the challenges ahead. And that clarity is crucial for us, as well. As we venture forward into life and ministry, into the work and service God is calling us to, it is crucial that we know and remember, that we keep remembering and keep believing, this Good News: heaven with all the riches and resources contained therein is open to us, the Holy Spirit with all the power of God is present with us, and the Father of heaven and earth has declared us, each one of us, you included, his beloved child. God is pleased with you, loves you, and delights to call you his child. Like the seed and like Jesus, we simply need to trust the Gardener and live into, live out, who we really are.

Prayer:

Lord Jesus, as in your baptism by John you joined with us, identifying yourself with all humanity, so we thank you that in being baptized in your name, we have joined with you and been given new identities with you as beloved children of God. Thank you. Grant me the grace to believe such Good News and, by the power of your Spirit, to live with confidence as the person you have created me to be, to the good of all and the glory of your name. Amen.

Suggested Verses for Meditation and Memorization:

“Now when all the people were baptized and when Jesus had also been baptized and was praying, the heaven was opened, and the Holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, ‘You are my Son, the beloved; with you I am well pleased.’”

Luke 3:21-22

Some Thing(s) to Try:

- As you meditate on this week’s suggested verses, consider how what took place at Jesus’ baptism would have been helpful as he ventured into life and ministry. Consider how God’s Word to you in your baptism can strengthen you for life and ministry.
- Thank God for your baptism as you reflect on all it means for you, including God choosing and naming you as his precious child, God forgiving you and washing away your sins, God descending and being present to you through the Holy Spirit, God welcoming you into his family and blessing you with people to love and be loved by, to grow and serve and live your new life in Christ with.
- Practice sitting still with God away from distractions for five minutes or more each day. Slowly breath in and out, saying, “Heaven is open to me,” or “The Holy Spirit is with me,” or “I am loved.”
- Breathe deeply and quietly, repeating one of the phrases in the bullet point above, for brief moments during the day – as you sit at a stop light, before heading out the door or into a meeting, as you wait for an appointment, when you get anxious, you get the idea.
- Talk with God in quiet prayer or in a journal about what it might mean to live out your identity as a child of God this year. Commit yourself to growing and serving in specific ways, not to prove anything, but simply to be who God created you anew in Christ to be.
- Practice praying in the way the Apostle Paul urges us in Philippians 4:6-7. Talk with the God who sees you as his beloved child about the things that trouble you. Give thanks for God’s faithfulness, that he sees you, hears you, and answers you as you pray.

Further Suggested Readings:

- Isaiah 43:1-7
- Psalm 29
- Acts 8:14-17
- Ephesians 2:8-10