

A Reading of Luke 3:15-22 (The Baptism of Jesus)...

Do you ever hear... “voices”?

Several years ago when our son played high school soccer, as a parent I had to work in the concession stand on several occasions on the nights we had home games. One evening as we were just getting started, I was joking with the person I was working with and told her that I had to do whatever the voices in my head told me to do.

What I said didn't phase her, but the gentleman putting condiments on his hot dog had a look of confusion and concern upon his face. After a momentary pause, he cautiously said, “I can help you with that. I am a psychologist.”

With a grin on my face, I said, “And I'm a preacher!”

“Oh... I guess you *have* to listen to those voices then!” And with that, he walked away as fast as he could.

Now I have to appreciate the fact that he seemed to care enough about me – a stranger, perhaps, in more ways than one... but to care enough to want to help me if he could.

Luke and Isaiah, listening to the voice that spoke to them, sought to offer the word of the Lord unto a people who were less than happy with their current situation in life. Isaiah, as we shall soon hear, addressed his peers who were still living in exile in Babylon. Speaking on the Lord's behalf, he sought to offer them hope... to remind them that the Lord had not forgotten them... that their God would soon lead them home... to the land of their ancestors – Israel.

Luke, on the other hand, spoke of a people who remained to live and work in this land, but who – like those in exile in Babylon – were anything *but* free...as their land was occupied and governed by a Roman governor and legions of soldiers who – to add insult to injury – heavily taxed the people to support their unwanted presence in their land!

The people were *ready* for a messiah... for someone – anyone – who might purge this land of these pagan parasites!

John quickly made it quite clear that he was not the one they sought, but that person was coming.

In Luke's account, there is no dialogue between John and Jesus... but as Luke's message makes clear, Jesus was the one of whom John spoke..., and this Jesus began his ministry in the midst of where the people had gathered.

Jesus did not come with fanfare or an attitude that he was better than others. Quite the contrary, as the one who did not need to be baptized with the baptism of repentance, came and walked into the water with them... as he came to live and serve amongst the sinful, the broken, and the overwhelmed.

Jesus, as Luke shows us, was a man of prayer... one who kept his focus on the heavenly Father... whose Spirit filled Jesus this day... and confirmed his calling with those words: “*You are my Son, the Beloved, with you I am well pleased.*”

In a day long before this one, Isaiah was led to proclaim unto his people:

A Reading of Isaiah 43:1-7....

Whether through John or Isaiah or even the likes of you and me,
the Lord's Word remains the same... and still begs to be pro-
claimed... as even today he still calls out unto all people
wherever they are in life: in whatever land; in whatever
situation; whether then be rich and living well or
poor and homeless; be they educated or illiterate;
man, woman, or young person; no matter
what the color of their skin may be or
what language they speak; or whatever
else we have allowed to come
between ourselves and all of
God's children.

For His Word is the same:

"Do not fear..., for I am with you; I have redeemed you...."

What He offers us cannot be earned... it is a gift... if we
will but accept it... and live the life to which He calls us.

"I have called you by name, you are mine."

We are not a stranger to him... He knows us... He knows what we
have done – and failed to do... He knows what we are doing...,
and He chooses to love us anyway! He knows what we can
be... if we will but follow in the way He would lead us..

"You are my Son"... my Daughter... my Child... *"the Beloved"...*
the one I love... and you are but one of many!

The Lord was well pleased with Jesus because he was willing to
leave the past behind him and now do what needed to be done.
He was willing to do what he expected of others – thus
putting mean upon the words that seem so empty when
spoken by many others who do not practice what
they preach.

Yet what of ourselves? Is the Lord "well pleased" with us?

Most, if not all, of us have been baptized..., and if baptized as an
infant or young child, we have probably been confirmed... that
is, we have affirmed for ourselves the vows that were made
on our behalf at our baptism... thus accepting for
ourselves the gift – and responsibilities – that our
Lord has offered us. Yet – as with most things
in life – of what good is any of this if we do
not put into practice the promises we have
made to God and to each other?

Considering the schedules we have as well as the work and family
responsibilities that many of us have to deal with day after
day, it may seem excusable that we might forget the
covenant between ourselves and the Lord. Yet when
we do, the ones who suffer the most are
ourselves... and those who may never know
the love of Christ for them except
through the opportunities set before
us to make this real for them.

Today I would invite you to set aside your excuses and to join with
me in reaffirming our baptismal covenant and the call of Christ
to share in his ministry unto the world.

Will you turn with me now to page 50 in the Hymnal?

Instructions for how this will be offered.....