

**January 13, 2019 Baptism of Jesus Sunday**  
**Rev. Jen Nagel, University Lutheran Church of Hope**

**Isaiah 43:1-7, Psalm 29, Acts 8:14-17**  
**Luke 3:15-17, 21-22**

The Power of 'You' on Working Preacher.com, Karoline Lewis, posted 1-6-19.

**Grace and peace to you, beloved Children of God. Amen.**

**Last Sunday as I headed toward the sanctuary for the second service,**

I found myself in step with Sophia and her mom, Stephanie.

They were coming from Sunday School and Sophia had a good grip on a baby doll, clearly a favorite.

Sophia explained to me that in Sunday School that morning, they'd learned about baptism.

And, not only that, but they'd done some baptizing.

That baby doll, whose name is Emma, the whole group of kids had baptized over and over again, practicing.

Now, I admit, I would have loved to have stood quietly in the doorway to witness this class,

but hearing Sophia excitedly relay the experience was a witness in itself.

I savor the image of the youngest in this community of faith

lovingly dousing baby doll Emma with baptismal waters,

small fingers marking her with the cross of Christ,

strong voices naming her a beloved Child of God.

**Today is Baptism of Jesus Sunday.**

In this season of Epiphany, this time when our stories remind us how God and God's power are revealed,  
today we hear Luke's rendition of Jesus' baptism.

The crowds headed for the River Jordan are murmuring with expectation, could this be the Messiah?

The politics are high, scandalous, in fact: In the few verses the lectionary-people skipped John the Baptizer  
was shut up in prison for he dared raise concerns over Herod's affair with his brother's wife.

So, right there, with questions in the air, with things as messy as ever, the heavens open: then the Holy  
Spirit alights, then we hear, ***You are my Child, my beloved; with you I am well pleased.***

**Those words, that promise,** they echo through the rest of Luke's gospel: You are my child, my beloved.

They echo as Jesus calls to Zacchaeus up there in the sycamore tree: *You are my child, my beloved.*

They echo to the widow of Nain, and so many others, the outcast, the forgotten, the hurting, the lonely:

*You are my child, my beloved.*

They echo as the Samaritan dares pause to see the fellow in the ditch, not walk by, but see him, hear his  
need, and respond in love: *You are my child, my beloved.*

**YOU, God says to Jesus**, so simply, so clearly, even in the messy, complicated politics of his time,  
and, YOU, Jesus says over and over again to those he heals and forgives and teaches,  
and, YOU, God says to each of us: *You are my child, my beloved.*

And that, in turn, is the way we are called to meet and see one another, those we love dearly, those we respect and those we don't, those who irritate and annoy, those who madden and frighten:

*You are a child of God, beloved.*

It echoes doesn't it?

I am a child of God, and because of this, I can say the same to you, and you can say the same to another. This is how Epiphany works, really how baptism works—being known and named as Christ's beloved, and then seeing, affirming this beloved identity in those with whom you interact.

Forgiveness and mercy, beyond our merit; grace for the days ahead; courage for the work before us.

**This Sunday we're lifting up those in our congregation who help us live our baptisms.**

Truth is, at our best, this is a big, broad group, for that's a calling of this life of faith,  
supporting one another in living as the Beloved.

Faith Formation leaders, Sunday School teachers, they do this.

So do Godparents and family members and friends, the whole community, really.

Today, I'm also thinking about a few in particular around Hope.

**Karen Jorstad** faithfully sends out materials to the families of those newly baptized, materials that help them nurture their child's faith, and yearly anniversary cards to mark this milestone.

Karen wrote recently, "I like to hand write the addresses on Splash materials instead of using labels, as it gives me a moment to think about what age [and] stage each child is in, and [to pray] for them and their parents while I am readying the materials for monthly mailings."

**Nancy XXXXXXXX creates the red banners that are given at each baptism.**

Each small banner includes the person's full name and baptismal date.

On baptism days, they grace our worship space, and then go home with the newly baptized as a daily reminder.

Nancy practices family medicine and does her share of delivering babies.

Nancy tells me that she stitches these banners during those waiting times at the hospital, and I love the way her own baptismal faith inspires her stitching, and her doctoring.

**This year Tim Abrahamson**, one of many skilled wood workers around Hope, took apart the wooden base of the baptismal font in the chapel—it needed care to renew and strengthen it.

He also added strong wheels that allow us to move it around and use it more easily in that worship space.

When the Confirmation students and Intern Linqing and I meet, we end our sessions in the chapel, moving the font out a bit so we can all stand around it, should to shoulder, fingers resting in the precious waters, praying together from our hearts—it's powerful and Tim's work on that font makes it possible.

**Many of you have heard** how Wayne Lee and Tim created the beautiful font here in the sanctuary.

It's one thing to create it, but it's also Wayne who comes by every so often when the font gets quirky, and then Wayne tinkers so the water flows and heats and moves, just so.

Today I thank God for these four beloved who use their gifts, their passions, their values, to help the rest of us remember that we too are beloved children of God, called to use our gifts.

**As we talk about baptismal identity**, I'm thinking about the nametags we use occasionally here at Hope.

I'd love to just print them all with the name Beloved, but I also want us to know one another in our unique particularity and identity, identity that honestly is growing and evolving...

and that brings me to Pronouns.

In our community, there are plenty of folks who use pronouns like he/him/his, or she/her/hers.

There are other folks who'd much prefer that we call them with pronouns like they/them/theirs or others.

Perhaps they identify as queer or trans or non-binary, perhaps their pronoun preferences are changing.

When we use nametags in the coming weeks, I ask you to put your name, but also to add your pronouns.

I'd write: Pastor Jen, and then under that I'd write simply: she/her/hers.

This gives those talking with me confirmation of my preferences, really, my identity.

I can hear some folks saying, oh, everyone just knows.

This begs us—all of us—to examine our privilege—think about that.

We don't have pronoun police around this church.

We do have an invitation and a responsibility to honor one another by seeing each other as our truest, most God-claimed, beloved-selves, and these pronouns are part of being that kind of beloved community.

Dear ones, in baptism, we are known and named as beloved, and then we can see, and affirm this true and beloved identity in those we meet.

The kids knew that as they baptized baby doll Emma, over and over again: *You are a child of God, beloved.*

**On Wednesday morning**, long time member, Robert Agrimson, died.

Robert was 96 years old and is loved by his daughter Ann Agrimson and Tim Gustafson, grandchildren Gus and Peter, and a web of family and friends. Robert's beloved wife, Joy, died 4½ years ago.

When Robert was quite small, his mother died and he was sent to live with his aunt and uncle, milking cows on the dairy farm near Peterson, in far southeastern Minnesota.

When he left the farm, Robert trained as an electrician.

For 25 years he maintained the generators at the Ford Hydro plant.

He had the persistence and self sufficiency of a farmer, and was skilled at woodworking and needlecrafts, camping and canoeing, and loved lutefisk and lefse.

To this font, Robert and Joy brought Ann for baptism, and here they gathered at the end of Joy's life.

Robert knew a wonderfully open Spirit and had a trust in God's big, wide embrace.

On Wednesday we will gather in that same wide mercy of the God who names us beloved.

We'll give thanks for Robert's life, we'll share stories, and we'll commend beloved Robert to God's love.

**When members of this congregation die,**

we remember how the waters that first washed over them in baptism, hold them now in death.

We pray at the baptismal font, linking ourselves to God's powerful waters of promise.

**Holy God, holy and powerful, we remember before you today our brother Robert Agrimson. We thank you for giving him to us to know and to love as a companion in our pilgrimage on earth. At these waters of baptism, you welcomed him into your love. At these waters, you comforted him in times of trouble and encouraged him in delight. At these waters, you now enfold him into Jesus' death and resurrection and the promise of life everlasting. Console us who mourn and bring us together to feast with all the saints of God. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.**