

That's the foundation of God's grace—  
an unearned love just because.  
God calls his son his beloved.  
I believe God calls us beloved.  
We are God's children and he  
loves us.  
This is basic stuff. God  
loves us.

I wish I could erase the events of this past week.  
I wish I could erase COVID-19 from the earth.  
I wish I could love better.

We cannot go back to the way it was.  
First day wishing, however,  
is not really about turning back time.  
It is about becoming a new creation,  
a new being.  
Ultimately, it is about returning  
to the waters of Jesus'  
baptisms.

Creation and baptism cannot be separated.  
It is the first day.  
In baptism we are a new creation,  
a new being.

And we stand the chance of being changed.  
Of learning love again.  
Tolerance. Kindness.

Every time we return to the baptismal waters  
we return to the first day.

Every time we return to the baptismal waters  
we claim our identity in Jesus  
as beloved sons and daughters.

Every time we return to the baptism waters  
God again manifests  
and reveals himself in humanity.

Every time we return to the baptismal waters  
we return to that first day  
of light, love, life,  
and the promise of all that might be.

Whatever our lives have been  
or might now be,  
the baptismal waters await us.  
So let us return to the water.

Let the waters of God's love  
wash and rid us and the world  
of fear, hate, and despair.

God is saying to us today,  
"You are my beloved;  
with you I am well pleased."

Embrace each other  
in the love God has freely given,  
and do for those  
who long to be loved.

Love can change the world for good.  
It is the only thing that ever has.

**AMEN**

**Sermon preached in Immanuel Episcopal  
Church, Highlands, Wilmington, DE**

January 10, 2021 | Epiphany 1B |  
Baptism of our Lord

The Rev. Curtis Kennington

**Genesis 1:1-5, Psalm 29, Acts 19:1-7,  
Mark 1:4-11**

You are mine.  
In you I am well pleased.  
These are the words  
from someone who loves us  
almost more than we can  
handle.

These are not words spoken often enough.  
Simple kindness  
and words of  
comfort and tender love are rare.

We look around and see  
this is not the case in the world.

In the world,  
we hear how fast or how shiny  
or how much or hurry up  
or wait or leave me alone or I'm  
stressed.

Or, you're wrong, I'm right.

This morning we witness God our Father,  
the Lord of heaven and earth,  
comes down from the sky  
and saying to Jesus,  
to all of us,  
you are mine and I am  
well pleased.

Man, I could use hearing this more often.  
I know my family loves me.  
I know it. I am sure. No doubts.

There are days I walk in the house  
and it takes a minute to notice I'm  
there.

I understand.  
Everyone has had a long day.

Mocha, our rescue dog,  
she comes at me,  
squirming and wagging and smiling,  
and I swear, if she could speak,  
she would say,

“You're home. You're mine. I am well pleased.  
Now...give me a treat.”

What encouraging words these are:  
“With you I am well pleased.”  
When spoken to someone,  
these words awaken a sense of  
certainty.

Sadly, so many of us  
do not hear these kinds of things enough.  
We may only be reminded of failures or  
shortcomings.

Unfortunately, this behavior passes on to others.  
This behavior may lend itself to darkness.  
To our hearts hardening.  
To the buildup of anger and hate.

I was angry this week.  
How about you?  
I was scared.  
I confess hate was in my heart.

What happened in Washington was unacceptable.  
But was it? Did some accept that as normal?  
I was, like many of you, terrified,  
but in some ways barely surprised.

That level of hate has been building.  
But I say this, to myself and you  
and all of God's beloved:

These people were not born wanting to hate.  
These people were not born angry at the  
world.  
Hate and bigotry and racism must be  
taught.  
instilled.

It comes from our families  
and our teachers  
and our preachers  
and our friends.

It comes from peer pressure and bullies  
and more often than not,  
we hear it from the voice of our leaders,  
and we are inspired.

DO you know what else can be taught?  
Respect. Honor. Kindness.  
Character. Dignity. Love.

It comes from our families  
and our teachers and our preachers and  
our friends.

We are not born ready to hate.  
It must be studied. Learned.  
And I believe it can be unlearned.

We can choose to study love.  
And that begins everyday.  
New. Morning by morning.

It begins at birth and,  
in our baptism,  
is sealed upon us by the Holy  
Spirit.

Today's story in Mark is about Jesus' big day.  
His baptism.  
Do you remember yours?  
I do not remember mine.  
I was about three weeks old.

In the Sacrament of Baptism,  
we welcome new believers into the Body of  
Christ.  
As we pass through the waters of  
baptism,  
we are asked to do all in our power  
to support each other.

All of us have an important role to play  
in our spiritual development.  
It is no small thing  
what we do around the baptismal  
font,  
since all of us take solemn vows  
for which God will hold us  
accountable.

We are loved by our Heavenly Father  
so that we can in turn love one another.

What is love  
if it is not freely received  
and shared with those around us?  
We are to model Jesus to the  
world.  
We are to model the beloved.

God is well pleased with us.  
Yes, us. Yes, even today.  
Yes, even those other people.  
The ones we don't like  
or agree with  
or even notice.

And God is pleased  
just because of who we are...his  
children...his beloved.

