

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.

