

## “Remember Your Baptism”

1st Pres San Bernardino

Matt. 4:1-11

2/10/08 Lent 1

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The story that is ours today is a powerful one.

It says a great deal about Jesus’ ministry, and what kind of a Messiah he will be, and it says a great to each of us, if we have ears to hear.

This walk into the wilderness happens **right on the heels of Jesus’ baptism.** You remember: He meets John the Baptizer, he goes down under the water, he rises and the heavens open, the Spirit of God alights on him like a dove, and he hears **“You are my beloved, with whom I am well pleased.”**

“You are my beloved”-It is the story of Jesus’ identity- who he really is. And it is followed, immediately, by this desert story. He is led into a wilderness place, and after a long enough time there, he is **famished.**

Perhaps you have spent some time in a wilderness place- a place of great loneliness or loss or sorrow. It might have been a failing marriage or a season of joblessness. It might have been a long walk with a terminal illness, or when your first love broke your heart, or when others suffered because of your failure. All of us have spent time in a bleak and comfortless landscape, it is part of what it means to be human. **And if you stay there long enough, you will eventually be empty and starving and famished.**

When we are famished, says preacher Anna Carter Florence, here is the thing we forget: **Who We Are.**

- We are beloved children of God, and there is nothing that can take that love from us
- We are loved unconditionally- before we do anything to earn it, and even after we fail and are ashamed.
- We are God’s beloved, **and when we know that, we can live out of a kind of generosity and abundance that is truly blessed.**

But the desert can make us doubt that abundance, and fear scarcity.

If we have spent long enough in the wilderness, we will start to wonder:

Am I really enough?

Is God really in charge around here?

Does God love me anymore?

Will I survive this?

**And it is then that we will swallow almost anything- because we are starving.**

And the Voice of Temptation knows about that doubt and that fear of scarcity, and *changes* the words “You are my beloved”  
With just one tiny word: “if”  
**“If** you are the Beloved...”

All of a sudden, things go from the unconditional love of God which is promised to us at baptism,  
(and which we need like we need air,)  
To a conditional love that *might or might not* be ours...maybe God loves me, maybe I misunderstood. Maybe God’s love is real and sustaining, maybe I was foolish to trust it in the first place.  
**And when the love that we need to survive becomes conditional, then there is the need to prove it, earn it, show it.**

It becomes **like a bad TV reality show:**

*Maybe* I am safe- or maybe they will vote me off the island.  
*Maybe* I am beautiful-or maybe the judges will like someone else better.  
*Maybe* I am gifted- or maybe I am NOT the next American Idol.  
What we hear about our deepest identity changes from “You are!”  
To “If you are...”

And it is then that we are in real danger.

- It is then that we are so lonely and in such pain that we might fall in love with someone else’s spouse who hears our hurt.
- It is then that we decide to go ahead and drink, because no one cares anyway.
- It is then that we need to be Right at all costs, that we need to be Perfect, that we need to Work Harder than anyone else and cannot afford to rest.

Twelve step programs like Alcoholics Anonymous have a piece of wisdom that they have distilled into the acronym “**H.A.L.T.**” It is a reminder to those who are healing to stop what you are doing if you are becoming too Hungry, too Angry, too Lonely, or too Tired. They have learned, through years of accompanying people through transformation, that if we are too hungry, too angry, too lonely, or too tired, we will become famished. We will forget our deepest identity, and we will be vulnerable. There will be

nothing between us and that yawning, consuming, insatiable need. If we get there, we need to HALT and ask for help, for we are likely to do something that will be destructive to ourselves or to another. Becoming famished is dangerous for recovery.

**What are we to do when we find ourselves in that famished place?** What are we to do when our emptiness becomes so great that we are desperate and beside ourselves?

**Don't swallow the 'if', don't believe the 'maybe', don't listen to that conditional voice.**

When we are in that place, the thing to do is what Jesus did when he was famished and began to hear voices.

**Remember your baptism.**

Remember Who You Are- *'you are my beloved'*

Remember to Whom you belong.

Remember who dwells within you, and what your birthright is.

And this table is the perfect place to remember. **This table is the place to bring your hunger, and it is the place to be fed, in the deepest part of your being. It is the place where your emptiness and your need are not handicaps or barriers, but open spaces that the Bread of Life can fill.**

In a book I read recently, the author observed how the French approach meals differently:

*"As a newcomer, I was transfixed. It was the pace, mostly, and the manner of the French. They listened more closely. They watched you when you spoke. They were both intent and languid. They did not seem, as Americans so often do, even in times of leisure, hurried or distracted. When they ate, they appeared to taste and savor carefully, but without fanfare. It was as if they had been raised to pay attention in a way that we had forgotten, or discarded as impractical."*

P.17, *A Meal Observed*, A. Todhunter

So come. And pay close attention to what happens.

Amen.