



# SERMONS AT SAINT MARK'S

---

CANON WENDY CLAIRE BARRIE, CANON FOR INTERGENERATIONAL MINISTRIES  
THE FIRST SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY, YEAR C, JANUARY 9, 2022  
ISAIAH 43:1-7; PSALM 29; ACTS 8:14-17; LUKE 3:15-17, 21-22

## BELOVED

**Luke 3:15-17, 21-22** [As the people were filled with expectation, and all were questioning in their hearts concerning John, whether he might be the Messiah, John answered all of them by saying, "I baptize you with water; but one who is more powerful than I is coming; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand, to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his granary; but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire." Now when all the people were baptized, and when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, the heaven was opened, and the Holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased."

This might be my favorite Bible story. It's hard to choose. But if there is just one story I wish you could hear every night before you fall asleep, it's this one—Jesus's baptism. On the first Sunday after the Epiphany each year we tell this story, and we are invited to remember our own baptisms, to renew in community the promises we make to God about what we believe—what

we give our hearts to—and how we try to live out those beliefs. It's a great day to call godparents and godchildren, parents, siblings, and children, to remember the baptisms we've been part of celebrating. Family stories and Bible stories strengthen the bonds between us, give us a sense of identity, and help us find ourselves as part of a larger narrative.

If stories tell us who we are, Bible stories tell us *whose* we are.

God says to us through the prophet Isaiah:

*“Do not fear, for I have redeemed you  
I have called you by name, you are mine.”*

We also heard a short family story from Acts, reminding us of what the apostles were up to in the first days of the church—giving those who had been baptized in water the gift of the Holy Spirit that they had received on Pentecost in fire and wind.

And Luke’s Gospel begins with the family story of Jesus’s cousin John. It’s easy to imagine stories about John, the odd one, who lived in the wilderness and made a ruckus, who was called the dipper because he had taken on baptizing people in the river nearby, people wondering whether he was the Messiah they were waiting for, the anointed one of God.

No, says John, one more powerful than I is coming, “who will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand, to clear

his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his granary; but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.”

You may be wondering how *that’s* good news.

We often hear the metaphor of the winnowing fork, a tool that’s used by harvesters even today, as one of punishment and exclusion, but its purpose is not to separate good wheat from bad. Winnowing harnesses the power of wind to separate each grain of wheat from its inedible chaff. All the wheat, once the husks are blown away, is to be gathered into the granary.

*“Do not fear, for I have redeemed you  
I have called you by name, you are mine.”*

Whatever it is that Jesus is winnowing from us, it’s that which keeps us from being what we were made for. It’s whatever is holding us back from participating fully in the work God has given us to do.

“Now when all the people were baptized, and when *Jesus also* had been baptized...” With these two words, *Jesus also*, Luke explicitly includes us,

wants us to know that Jesus, fully divine, shares our human experience of being washed clean and starting anew, of changing our minds and hearts, of turning from one way of life to another, to come closer to God.

Here's the part I want you to know by heart— the words that God says to Jesus at his baptism God says to each of us: *“You are my child, the beloved, with you I am well-pleased.”* Every night I want you to whisper these words to your children before they fall asleep and I want you to say them to yourself: *You* are God’s beloved child, and God is so happy with you.

Yes, there is work to do, and it’s no coincidence that it is after his baptism, after the Holy Spirit comes down like a dove, that Jesus has the strength and courage to go into the wilderness himself. It’s with knowledge of his belovedness that Jesus starts his public ministry. With the knowledge of our belovedness, we follow Jesus. In belovedness, Soren and Shaila will be baptized today and begin their Christian journey. “Beloved is where

we begin,” says the poet and pastor Jan Richardson:

“If you would enter  
into the wilderness,  
do not begin  
without a blessing.  
Do not leave  
without hearing  
who you are:  
Beloved,  
named by the One  
who has traveled this path  
before you.  
Do not go  
Without letting it echo  
in your ears  
And if you find it hard  
To let it into your heart,  
Do not despair.  
That is what  
this journey is for.”

Amen.

Excerpt from “Beloved is Where We Begin” is used with permission c Jan Richardson from *Circle of Grace: A Book of Blessings for the Seasons*.  
janrichardson.com



SAINT MARK'S  
EPISCOPAL CATHEDRAL

*Saint Mark's Cathedral lives in a grounded faith and spirituality; we seek to liberate people for ministry. We are grounded in ancient Christian scripture and tradition while at the same time remaining open to the insight and truth of contemporary life. You'll find Saint Mark's Cathedral actively involved in service and outreach to our community. Together we pray, worship, study the scriptures, and explore the richness of twenty-one centuries of Christian experience. Wherever you are on your journey of faith, you are welcome here!*