

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.'

The Apple Doesn't Fall Far from the Tree

1. Who do you take after? I think I take after my father in a lot of ways. One way I take after him is my love for the outdoors. Another way I take after him is my abstract thinking, which often leads my mind to wander in many directions, which contributes to another way I take after my father, which is my habit of leaving coffee cups laying around; I remember often finding empty, dirty coffee cups laying around outside in the wood shed or the storage barn or the cellar. This would drive my mom crazy as she would always be wondering where all the coffee cups were. Well, I do the same, and I think Hyesun has adapted to my absentmindedness with coffee cups by collecting a surplus of cups and not ever using any cups that belong to a set; we have a cupboard with about 30 unique coffee cups, so I can leave 3 or 4 laying around and she doesn't worry about it.
2. I also take after my mother in the way I always try to think about the future. My mother is one who has a hard time living in the present, of just being content to live in the moment. She always asks about what you're *going to* do, and that has made her very effective at planning her life to the point where she is comfortable and secure, but it's hard for her just to enjoy the moment. I'm working on that in my life, that is to

live for the moment rather than thinking always about the future, but it doesn't come easy for me. I'm TOO much like my mother in that sense.

3. The question of who we take after is one we often ask either directly or privately. As a pastor I get to know a lot of families, and I'm often amazed at just how much children take after their parents. The funny thing is that when you're living in close proximity to your children or your parents you don't always see how much you take after one another, but as you grow older and as you are often separated by time or space you start to notice those similarities. The saying is correct; **the apple doesn't fall far from the tree.**
4. Which is a wonderful thing considering that God is our ultimate parent, that we are God's children. Clearly we're not like God in every way, and our desire to be independent of God has led us to become insecure about our own future, and so we obsess over our own survival as individuals or as tribes; we can be very kind and generous as long as our own needs are met, but if there's any doubt that those needs are met we start limiting our generosity to those closest to us; there's nothing extraordinary about that. But when we choose to *repent* of our selfishness, to mend our broken ways and restore a relationship with God, all of God's goodness can be seen in our behaviors. We trust in God more and we fear less. We treat more people as neighbors and fewer as enemies. In essence, we do become more *like* God who loves and cares for and wants what is best for all his children, which is all humanity.
5. Today what I want to instill in you is how this sacrament of baptism is a way that God passes down his goodness to us as we pass that goodness on to generation after generation. Most of us here were baptized as infants, right? We don't remember much if anything about our baptism. But if you are a parent, you remember your child's baptism; you go out and you purchase a nice dress or suit that you'll likely use only once for that child. You'll invite your extended family to church, and you'll have some celebration after the actual baptism ceremony. If you are a member of a church and you care about that church's future, then you remember a child's baptism. Because that baptism reassures you that the Church is not dead, that there is a new generation who will be brought up in the church.

6. And to be brought up in the Church means that you are being brought up in an atmosphere of love and affirmation. In our Gospel lesson today we find Jesus being baptized by John – and some people puzzle over this fact that Jesus is being baptized by John who is performing a baptism of repentance while Jesus has nothing to repent *for*. I think we're over-thinking this; I think Jesus simply had a zeal to be in a loving relationship with God the Father, and he shared that zeal with everyone who was being baptized by John, and Jesus just wanted to be part of that movement. And what he experienced at his baptism was the voice of God that made three things quite clear to him: God told him, "You are my Son, the beloved. I am pleased with you." What does that mean?
 - a. You belong to God (you are a son or daughter of God)
 - b. God loves you.
 - c. And you are well-made (that is, God is pleased with you; you may have a "condition" or be on some "spectrum" but guess what? God made you the way that you are for a reason that perhaps only God knows at the time. I'm reminded of a book by Henri Nouwen called *Adam: God's Beloved...*).
7. Now we all struggle trying to get our minds around Jesus – his full divinity and his full humanity. We ask questions like, "Did Jesus need encouragement, or was he by nature just motivated to love God and do his utmost to obey God?" Whatever we may think about this, I think it must have been highly encouraging for Jesus to see the heavens opened, to see the Holy Spirit descend upon him like a dove, and to hear God say to him, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased."
8. And I believe that anyone who responds to God's calling to repent and follow God will hear those same words, "You are my Son...or Daughter, my Beloved; with you I am well pleased." "But pastor, we were baptized as infants. We didn't hear God say that to us. And our children are baptized as infants. They can't hear God say that to them."
Oh yes they can! They can hear it through your words and your deeds. The child who enters this church to be baptized probably won't remember a thing about the service; some of them sleep all the way through it. Some of them look at me as I'm holding them, and all they're thinking is, "Who is this weird guy who's getting my head

wet?" No, they won't remember much about the day that they are baptized, **but hopefully you will. Because on that day, whether you are a parent or a sponsor or a member of the church, YOU MAKE A VOW. You vow to raise this child in an environment of Christian love, AND THAT'S NOT JUST ANY LOVE; THAT IS GOD'S LOVE.**

9. **The ceremony of baptism reminds us all that we are God's children, we are loved, and we are made in a very special way.** That is very encouraging for each of us to remember, and it helps us to LIVE INTO those truths. It's not intended to give us an ego trip – "Hey, I'm really great, and God loves me, and I'm his son." No, it's meant to remind us just how close we are to God. The apple doesn't fall far from the tree, and we can celebrate that. But as we celebrate it, there is a child in our midst who needs to learn just how close to God HE is.
10. **And that becomes the mission of the parents and the family and the church.** We vow to show that child just how closely related to God he is, and we do that by showing him how close to God we are, by loving that child, by loving one another, by loving those who seem far from God's love, and by loving God.
11. **So today, take it to heart that you are loved by God, that you belong to God, that you are uniquely created by God, BUT GO ONE STEP FURTHER: RECOGNIZE JUST HOW CLOSE TO THE TREE YOU HAVE FALLEN. RECOGNIZE THAT THE SAME LOVE AND ACCEPTANCE THAT GOD HAS SHOWN TO YOU MUST BE SHOW BY YOU TO THOSE AROUND YOU. LET US PRAY.**