

# Loved for who you are

Acts 8:14-17; Luke 3:15-17, 21-22

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Baptism – awash in God’s love. Do you remember yours? Perhaps not.

One of the many controversies that had to be ironed out to form the Uniting Church in Australia – was child baptism. Some for it – some against. They argued: How can a baby confess sins, renunciate evil and swear to serve God? Some said, where is the choice in that and does it demean commitment when it is not voluntary?

Outback, baptising babies is called branding. And in a way, that it what it is. You show up and put the name of one particular denomination on the forehead of a bub. Ironically, most of the station people I know don’t really care which church shows up. Because it is about who loves you and to whom you belong and that’s not about a church.

It is really about what you see as baptism. I think these station families have a clearer idea than many because when you strip it all away, when you put aside institutional doctrine – it’s really about acknowledging a human’s beloved-ness – no matter what size they are.

Jesus was loved before he went into the water. He was holy and whole already but in his baptism, he was named: Beloved.

In many orthodox denominations, the person baptised is called to renunciate Satan, his demons and all evil. <sup>1</sup>

Rachel Held Evans says these demons could be interpreted as all the competing voices who have told you who you are through your life. These are the evil voices who tried to name you as screw-up; fat; lazy; faker; addict;– not the sharpest pencil in the box.

In Baptism, you are named ‘beloved’ and the world changes because that is enough. You should renounce anything that tells you otherwise.

Baptism is a defiant act. John was not a church, he was probably an Essene, a member of a messianic sect. But he was recognised as a prophet. In his day, he had many followers and today, still, he is a prophet for Christians and Muslims, Bahai; Druze and Mandæans. It was defiant act for Jesus to go to John to be

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<sup>1</sup> (the Uniting Church is kinder and simply calls you to repent sin)

immersed. To give himself over. It broke away from the expected and the norm.

As you know, Jewish tradition says before any significant religious ceremony, one would have a ritual bath: a Mikvah. Designed to wash away impurities.<sup>2</sup> But we are only Baptised once because you can only be born once.

I say, owning your own story is the Mikvah that prepares you for Baptism. How can we wash away all the things the world has tried to name us if we don't acknowledge the good and the bad of our own stories?

I have said it to you before and I will say it again, standing before the Probus group and talking honestly about my life was terrifying. It is not a perfect life. It is harder to stand before ourselves and speak truth than it is to stand before God and yet, the former is essential for the latter.

Like an alcoholic, we have to confess the total story to own it and be empowered by it. Because that is love. You love your child just as much or even more when they are wounded. So God loves you – but how can you feel it if you won't let yourself say it? If you can't acknowledge the totality of your life as God sees it?

There is a baptism of fire – and that's called life. It isn't always pretty but it is loved.

And that's where next week's readings begin to make sense. Each person with their own gifts. Each gift different.

Our baptism is the erasure of 'less-than' and is all about unique, but at one with the One – named 'beloved'. And that is enough.

Brenè Brown once talked about when she was broken, when she broke down – she joined a church as part of her healing. But she said, she joined for all the wrong reasons. She thought the church would be like a spinal block, an anaesthesia that would smother her pain but instead, she found it was like a midwife who said, I know it hurts but I'm here with you. Push.

My baptism was a subdued affair. A trickle of water in a small chapel and a morning tea with colleagues. I knew what I was signing in a contractual way but *now* when I think of it, I like to imagine it more like the running water we

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<sup>2</sup> Merimbula has been give one heck of a bath this week.

just heard; like standing under a warm streaming waterfall; like smashing to the surface of a deep green grotto. I like to imagine the feeling of washing the salt away and I will rise blinking into the sunshine...and I feel that because since my baptism or perhaps *because* of my baptism, I have been slowly naming and claiming my story.

It's not pretty but it's blessed and beloved.

Rising from the waters, refreshed and renewed reminds me of a John O'Donoghue's morning prayer:

I rise today  
in the name of silence  
womb of the word,  
in the name of stillness  
home of belonging,  
in the name of solitude  
of the soul and the earth.

I rise today  
blessed by all things,  
wings of breath,  
delight of eyes,  
wonder of whisper,  
intimacy of touch,  
eternity of soul,  
urgency of thought,  
miracle of health,  
embrace of God.

May I live this day  
compassionate of heart,  
clear in word,  
gracious in awareness,  
courageous in thought,  
generous in love. Amen

and that's how I will write an addendum to my story.