

Dear Friends,

Mark 1: 11

We have been looking at the relationship of love within the heart of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. We have heard that we are invited to enter and become a part of this relationship as we join with the Spirit in moving towards Jesus and with Jesus in being open to the Spirit. We come now to the third element in this invitation. We are invited to join with Jesus in hearing the voice of the Father.

After his baptism, Jesus heard the voice of God speaking to him from heaven saying, "You are my Son, the beloved; with you I am well pleased." Jesus held onto these words deep in his heart. He knew that he was God's son, loved by God with God's approval resting upon him. He therefore lived with a deep sense of being valuable and worthy. Hell trembled when it saw Jesus with this consciousness. Hell knew that it had to act or be overcome.

Immediately after his baptism Jesus was driven by the Holy Spirit into the wilderness. There he heard the tempter say, "If you are the Son of God ... If you are the Son of God." There was no "if" about it. Jesus had been assured by the voice of God speaking directly from heaven that he was God's beloved child. What God had given Hell was trying to wrestle away. Jesus however resolutely kept the truth of his identity. And what he knew for himself, he then wanted everyone else to know. He wanted each one to know that they were a beloved child of God.

So, he went to those who others despised or put down or described as being "no good"; he went to the poor, the broken and the fragile. He taught them all that they were God's children in whom God took delight. And he invites you now to join him in trusting that you are God's beloved child.

It's important for you to unite yourself with Jesus and hear God's words of acceptance. Many people are longing for approval. Perhaps they really wanted to get it from their parents, and maybe never really did. Maybe they are still seeking their parent's approval, even though their lives have moved on and perhaps their parents are long dead. It's important that you know that you are loved by God, that God delights in you. You are made in the image and likeness of God. You are a unique child of God's. No one like you has ever been before. No one like you ever will be again. You may do the same things that other people do, but no one does them in quite the way that you do.

One person who did trust that she was accepted by God was one of the friends of Teresa of Avilla. She spent hours praying in one of the ways that Teresa suggested. She imagined herself standing before Jesus while he looked at her humbly and lovingly. She spent so long in this kind of prayer that people felt forced to ask what she did with all the time. She said, "I just allow myself to be loved."

You, with Jesus, may trust that you are the beloved child of your heavenly Father. You may allow yourself to be loved by God. I remember once standing at the front

of a school hall, waiting to take an assembly. The children were filing in and sitting on the floor. There were about five hundred of them. It was terrifying. I was about to do my best to hold their attention for just five minutes. I was hoping that I might say something about God that would be meaningful to them. Row upon row of them came into the room. I didn't know them, not their stories or their hopes or fears. They were just a sea of faces. If I saw them out of the school, I would not recognise them. They did not choose where they sat. They made a line, when that line was complete, they started a new one. Where each child sat was just a matter of chance. One of them ended up in the front row, directly in front of me. She looked disgruntled. She shrugged her shoulders and sighed as though she was thinking, "Of all the places in all the school halls in all the world I have to walk in and sit down here, in this one, right in front of you". My perspective however was immediately changed. This was not just one in a sea of faces that I did not recognise. This was one of my very own daughters, Rachel. She has a special place in my heart. For her, I care deeply.

God's rather bigger than I am. There is no sea of anonymous faces with God. God knows each one; each name, each face, each voice. God can pick out each individual from everyone else in the world. God can distinguish between those who are now, those who have been and those who will be. God cares for the well-being of each person and wants everyone to flourish. God knows you and there's a special place in God's heart for you. "For you Jesus Christ came into the world, you he lived and showed God's love; for you he suffered death on the cross; for you he triumphed over death rising to newness of life; for you he prays at God's right hand; all this for you before you could know anything of it."

You are invited to unite yourself with Jesus in hearing the voice of God who says, "You are my child, the beloved; with you I am well pleased."

You are invited to enter into and become a part of the relationship of love in the heart of God, to join with the Spirit in moving towards Jesus, and to join with Jesus, both in being open to the Spirit and in hearing the voice of the Father.

God bless you,

Tony