

Scripture:

Psalm 16

John 20: 19-31

“Precious and beautiful to God.”

We are --- all ----- each and every one of us gathered here today ----- precious and beautiful to God.

And that is the heart of the gospel for today --- God loves us and we are precious and beautiful in His eyes.

And perhaps the most powerful aspect of this truth is that there is nothing this world can throw at us ----- and there is nothing that we can do --- or not do --- that will ever change this.

The most fundamental truth of our existence is that we are all precious and beautiful to God.

God knows all there is to know about us --- loves us --- and always will.

We don't earn love with God --- we don't gain or influence love with God -- --- we don't lose love or favour with God ---- God loves us ---- God loves us --- God loves us --- and God loves us in the particular --- in very deep down personal ---- and intimate ways.

Whose we are ----- children of God --- matters more than who we are.

“On the evening of that first day of the week --- when the disciples were together --- with the doors locked for fear of the Jewish leaders --- Jesus came and stood among them and said ----“Peace be with you.” --- so our gospel reading begins today.

The disciples are behind locked doors --- full of fear.

Jesus has just been crucified ----- and He has just walked out of the tomb of death --- appearing to some of His followers --- and now in John's gospel today --- He appears before all of His disciples --- eventually ----- Thomas isn't there the first time Jesus appears but he is the second time.

And it's remarkable how Jesus first greets His disciples ----- "Peace be with you." --- He says.

He knows they are fearful ----- He knows they are all holed up --- behind locked doors --- anxious and unsure of what comes next ---- and so He comfort them --- hoping to put them at ease.

"Peace be with you." --- He says.

And he says this precisely because these fear filled ----- hiding away ---- confused --- uncertain anxious group of followers --- are all precious and beautiful to Him --- including Thomas.

Including Thomas.

Imagine if you will ---- all of His disciples huddled together in fear --- hiding behind locked doors --- not out sharing the Good News --- not out making disciples of all nations --- not building and sharing the kingdom of God ----- but huddled up ---- seized by fear.

Jesus could have reprimanded them --- admonished them ----- told them to get it together and get out there and witness and testify ---- but He doesn't --- -- He knows they are paralyzed with fear.

And they are precious and beautiful in His sight and so He comes to comfort them --- "Peace be with you."

It's a perfect day to have a passage like this ---- a passage where we see the peace of Christ --- the comfort of Christ --- the precious and tender love of Christ shared with His followers.

Talk about precious and beautiful ----- look at the 3 children we had brought forward today ----- Sean ----- Elliot ----- and Maxwell.

They drive home the point --- their baptisms drive home the point that we are all precious and beautiful to God.

It matters less who we are --- and far more whose we are.

We are all children of God --- just as we have celebrated these 3 children of God.

Thank you David and Becky --- for bringing these children forward for Baptism today ---- what a gift they are to us.

What a gift from God they are.

We do well to remember this --- we are all gifts from God.

Yes ---- even when it can be sometimes hard to remember this --- we are all gifts from God --- precious and beautiful in His sight.

And this is true --- ----- even when we get cut off in traffic ---- or someone buds in front of us in line ----- or someone is rude to us ---- or we feel like we're knee deep in diapers --- or the kiddies are screaming ----- and crying -- -- and then there's the lack of sleep --- and there are so many things that can easily obscure things.

But all people on a fundamental level are precious and beautiful to God --- and so they ought to be to us as well in a certain sense.

When a mother and father --- and grandma --- and grandpa --- and aunt and uncle ---- and so on ----- just as when they look at their little ones and see the beauty and wonder ----- and simply love them ----- so that is how God looks on us.

We are the apple of God's eyes.

He looks on us with great favour --- unmerited love.

Just as we love our children no matter what ----- even when they sometimes drive us crazy ----- so God loves His children --- all of us here today --- no matter what.

And that is what matters most --- God's love for us --- God's profound love for us.

Thomas doubts.

Thomas wants to see Jesus for himself ----- he wants to put his hand into Jesus' side --- he wants to put his finger where the nails were ---- and until then --- until he can do these things he says he won't believe ---- see verse 25 from John's gospel today.

And so Jesus reappears before His disciples once gain ---- for a second time so that He can provide the opportunity for Thomas to touch and see for himself.

“Put your finger here --- see my hand. Reach out your hand and put it into my side.” ----- Jesus says to Thomas.

He doesn't reprimand or chastise him --- instead He simply says --- come and do what you need to do --- so that you can stop doubting and believe.

Thomas is so precious to Jesus that Jesus gives him just what he needs in order to believe.

And Jesus does the exact same thing with us if we come honestly and authentically before Him --- like a child --- with no pretense --- no expectations --- no junk in the way --- just honest --- accepting --- trusting --
- inquisitive hearts.

This interaction with Thomas is beautiful in its simplicity and in its power.

Thomas has some questions ----- Jesus provides some answers.

Thomas has needs --- Jesus meets them.

Thomas seeks certainty --- Jesus provides it.

“Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me --- I am sending you.” ----- Jesus says in verse 21 today.

That is the heart of the passage today.

Just as Jesus was precious and beautiful to God --- “This is my Son the beloved listen to Him!” ---- God said at Jesus’ baptism.

So Jesus says to us ----- “Just as my Father has sent me --- and loved me --- so I am sending you and loving you.”

Just as I am precious and beautiful ---- beloved in the eyes of my Father ----- so are you precious --- and beautiful ---- beloved in my eyes.

Whose we are --- matters more than who we are.

What has been done for us --- matters more than what we will ever do.

Thomas has doubts ---- he wants some clarity and certainty ----- and in truth this is all secondary to the fact that he is God’s beloved child --- a child of God.

We are not just anybodies --- we are not just nobodies ----- we are children of God --- all of us --- and the act of Baptizing remind us of this.

And this passage reminds us of this.

There is something special about a baptism ---- and not just for the children being baptized and their families --- but for all of us.

And it’s special for all of us because it reminds us all that just like the children being baptized ---- so we are all children of God.

Regardless of our age --- class ---- gender --- social standing ----- certain orientations ----- and so on ---- we are all children of God.

And of course this has implications for the church as well --- the gathering of the children of God.

The church is different from all other social groups.

The church isn’t just another collection of people --- it is the collection of the people of God.

We have divine origin as children of God --- and as people of God.

Our reason for being as church isn't based on apparent success or apparent failures --- in growth or in influence ----- how many members we have ----- how big our budget is or isn't ----- how awesome our building is or our studies are ----- our reason for being is all about our call and commission in Christ --- whose we are.

We are rooted in Christ.

Our foundation is not in a list of accomplishments or things we have done --- our roots ---- our foundation ----- is Jesus Christ --- He's what matters ---- not what we've done --- not what we've done through Him --- or because of Him --- but Him.

We are precious and beautiful to Him because of who He is.

I wasn't always a huge fan of the comic strip Dennis the menace ---- give me peanuts and Charlie Brown over any of the others for sure --- but I did love one Dennis the Menace in particular -----
----- the one where Dennis and his friend Joey are walking away from the Wilson's house with their hands full of cookies.

Joey asks, "I wonder what we did to deserve this?"

Dennis tells his friend, "Joey, Mrs. Wilson gives us cookies not because we're nice, but because she's nice."

"Joey, Mrs. Wilson gives us cookies not because we're nice, but because she's nice."

It's the same with God.

God does what He does for us not because we're nice but because He's nice ---- and so much more.

God loves us ----- because of who He is --- not because of what we have done or who we are.

Joey asks, "I wonder what we did to deserve this?"

Dennis tells his friend,

"Joey, Mrs. Wilson gives us cookies not because we're nice,

but because she's nice."

We are precious and beautiful to God because of who He is.

Just as Jesus walked into a room full of fledgling disciples --- full of fear --- confused --- anxious --- and said ---- "Peace be with you!" --- and ----- "Just as the Father sent me so I am sending you."

So the very same Risen Christ says to us --- relax --- be at peace ---- God loves you --- God is with you --- God will look after you --- you are not alone.

God wants us to know --- he is with us --- we can be at peace in the care of His loving embracing arms surrounding us ---- even if we can't always see and feel Him.

Our reading from John's gospel today concludes this way -- ----

"Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name."

"...and that by believing you may have life in his name."

God wants us to have life in His name.

God doesn't want us to be anxious --- fearful --- curled up in a ball behind closed doors like the disciples were.

God knows who we are ----- what we have done ---- what we have neglected to do ---- and He loves us.

When we get all bent out of shape like the disciples today ---- he comes to us and reassures us --- puts us at ease ---"Peace be with you." --- "I am with you!" ---- "Fear not."

We are the apple of God's eyes --- God sees us with rose coloured glasses.

God loves us because of who He is --- and in this regard he is unchanging.

As we just sang ----- In the bulb there is a flower.

To me this is a beautiful piece of music and it is also a beautiful piece of poetry.

“In the bulb there is a flower --- in the seed an apple tree --- in cocoons a hidden promise butterflies will soon be free!

In the cold and snow of winter there’s a spring that waits to be --- unrevealed until its season something God alone can see.”

Beautiful words --- and that’s just the first verse.

Inside of us there are things that God alone can see ---- God sees right into us and right through us --- we can hide certain things from others but we cannot hide anything from God ----- and the key is God still and always will ----- love us.

Not because we’re so precious and beautiful --- sometimes we can be pretty nasty and do unkind and selfish things --- but to God --- we are always always always only and ever precious and beautiful.

Many many things are unrevealed until their season --- things God alone can see.

God sees wonderful and amazing things in each and every one of us --- things we cannot ever actualize or bring to fruition on our own.

There are precious and beautiful things about each and every one of us ----- but we cannot actualize them ourselves --- we can’t bring them to fruition left to our own devices.

The bulb needs other things to make the flower --- soil --- water --- sun.

The seed needs other things to make the tree ---- soil --- water ---sun.

We need other things to make us bloom as well ---- the light and love of God --- Jesus Christ and the life He gives.

We are all precious and beautiful ---- we all have things that are precious and beautiful within us ----- unrevealed until their season ---- things that God alone can see way ahead of anyone else.

Just as baptism is not about what we have done but about what God has done for us in Christ.

So our lives --- our accomplishments ---- our very selves --- all that we are -- ---- all that we will ever become ----- are not about what we have done or accomplished but what God has done for us ---- with --- in --- and through Christ.

Today just as Jesus gathered among fear filled anxious and uncertain disciples and said to them peace be with you --- you are precious and beautiful to God ----- so too does He say to us ---
 ---- peace be with you -----
 and you and you --- and you --- and you -----

you are precious in my eyes ----- you are beautiful in my eyes.

We are all precious and beautiful in God's eyes ----- we are all to be at peace in the presence of our Lord.

When God looked on Jesus at His baptism He said ----- you are my beloved ---- with you I am well pleased.

So we are reminded today as we baptize --- that we are all God's beloved --- - we are all ones with whom God is well pleased.

This is the Good News of Christ ---- just as God loved Jesus and sent Jesus and guided Jesus ----- so He also loves --- send sand guides us.

We are all precious and beautiful in God's eyes --- we are the apple of God's eye.

God sees us with rose coloured glasses.

“In the bulb there is a flower --- in the seed an apple tree --- in cocoons a hidden promise butterflies will soon be free!

In the cold and snow of winter there's a spring that waits to be --- unrevealed until its season something God alone can see.”

Peace be with you.

Amen.