

From Pastor Marissa Becklin

God Who Is Well Pleased

As we move together into this new year of 2022 and try to remember to write down the correct year on our documents, we are surrounded again by the pressure from our world to make this year “our” year. With the arrival of January comes an onslaught of exercise equipment, diet, and home meal kit advertisements, along with goal-setting planners, health advertising, etc. Our society seems convinced each year that with the change from December to January we might also become new people—completely transformed into more loveable versions of ourselves.

In the church, our year begins with the story of Epiphany. When King Herod found out about the birth of a baby who was called God, he felt threatened and sent the three wisemen to do reconnaissance. Their job was to find out the baby’s location so that King Herod could eliminate the threat (i.e., kill Jesus). When the wisemen met Jesus, of course, their experience of divine love completely transformed them, and they rebelled against the sinful powers of the world by refusing to return to Herod. This bought Mary and Joseph time to run away to Egypt, where they hid until Herod’s murderous rampage had quieted.

This story is followed by the story of John the Baptist, who devotes his life to calling the world into repentance. “Repent” literally means “to turn a new way”, and John is inviting his community to turn away from sinfulness into a new life marked by divine forgiveness. His shouting in the wilderness tells us the truth about ourselves: we are made for more than the vitriol, hatred, mistrust, deceit, and anger that plagues us.

When Jesus is baptized by John, the heavens announce that God is “well-pleased”. This Son of God is enough, enough to reconcile all of humanity to God, enough to save us from our sins, enough to usher in resurrection and eternal life.

We live in a society obsessed with being made new, with self-invention. We hear the phrases “pull yourself up by your bootstraps” and “seize the day”, and we come to believe that our worth, belongingness, and even the quality of our year all depend on what we do. But these early January Bible stories tell us a different truth:

We live in a world marked by brokenness and sinfulness. The craving of individual power and might is sin—we see this clearly in King Herod’s violent rage. We cannot make ourselves new, because we are working with broken tools. If it is up to us to save ourselves and transform ourselves, we are doomed.

But as people of God we are not without hope. All it takes for the wisemen to be transformed is meeting baby Jesus. John the Baptist’s call to us to repent reminds us that divine forgiveness is waiting for us, that God *wants* a relationship with us. All we need to do is ask for help, and God is right next to us, is within us, helping us turn a new way. In Jesus’ birth and baptism, we are taught that God is well pleased with us, too: God created us for a purpose in the Kingdom, God loves us endlessly, God has sent Jesus to usher in forgiveness and everlasting life, and God wants a relationship with us.

You exist for a reason that is important to God’s work in the world. You might not see yourself how God sees you, but you are called to the work of repenting and sharing God’s good news of great love in this world just as you are—messy, broken, loved, claimed, and forgiven. In your baptism God has transformed you already into a servant of Christ, and is well-pleased with the result.

You are already equipped for the work God is calling you to.

In God’s peace, Pastor Marissa