

“Remember Whose You Are”  
A Epiphany One; Matthew 3:13-17  
January 8, 2017  
Congregational UCC, Buena Vista, CO  
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## **I. UH-OH**

"You Are a Child of God...Uh-Oh"

A Presbyterian pastor named John Buchanan tells the story of baptizing a two-year-old boy in a Sunday worship service. After the child had been baptized, Pastor Buchanan, following the directions of the Presbyterian prayer book, put his hand on the little boy's head and addressed him, "You are a child of God, sealed by the Spirit in your baptism, and you belong to Jesus Christ forever."

With that, the little boy looked up and responded, "Uh-oh."

The people in the congregation smiled, of course. But, then they realized this was far more than a “cute moment with the kids” in a worship service. The boy's response was a profound theological statement!

And, one we should consider *echoing* when we encounter the Holy—whether in the moment of Baptism, around the Communion Table, in an Epiphany on a mountain top, or any number of “aha moments.”

For Baptism—our own, or remembering our own, as we do today, or participating in that moment with others—from the tiniest babies to those who are 102 years young—is a profound act and a faith statement. It's a public declaration that we are moving into an *alternative* way of life; a way of living in God's kin-dom, that is “other” from the world around us.

UH—OH—It's a big deal! This is not about remembering a historical event that happened to someone *else*, a long time ago. Any more than celebrating God becoming incarnate and being born on earth as a baby is just about that *one* thing, long ago, that happened to someone else.

In re-mem-bering Jesus' baptism on this second Sunday of the new year, *we* go to the river, to the water, *with* Jesus.

It's also an “uh-oh” because there are responsibilities on our part that go with this declaration. And there's no turning back! For we are dedicating our very lives to a new and radical way of living—with new eyes, ears and heart. To seeing ourselves and others as God sees.

Uh-oh! And you thought New Year's Resolutions might be a challenge.

## **II. GOD PRESENT TO US SO MANY WAYS**

It's also an “uh-oh” if we have held too limited an understanding of Baptism. If it has been a “dividing line” a “requirement for membership in the In Club” for us as the Body of Christ, then Jesus challenges us to break open that barrier and take a new look at our own limited vision—as we go to the river with him and challenge John's hesitation.

“But Lord! You come to ME?! Haven't you got this backward here?!”

Some of us here today have been baptized in a church, or a river, or a font, and some have not. Some of us are not sure. But all may come to the water—to connect with Jesus, to remember that holy moment and sacred calling.

Bruce Epperly encourages us to broaden our understanding of Baptism; widen the embrace:

“Baptism is referred to as a sacrament, an invisible sign of a visible grace. But, God's grace is manifest in a variety of ways and *not* just the rites of the church.

Saving grace comes to us in the touch of a friend, a word of forgiveness, a loving home, and the opportunity to begin again. God's graceful interdependence is manifest in all things, and on occasion we discern these occasions as “thin places,” to use the language of the Celts, in which heaven and earth are transparent, and the word is made flesh in life transforming ways. The waters of baptism join us with the waters of creation and the call to care for the Earth, [and care for each other ON the earth, this fragile planet.]

“I believe that Jesus' baptism and God's affirmation is, in fact, an affirmation that Jesus is part of our story and that we share in God's

love just as Jesus did. In our own unique way, we embody holiness. “

By coming to the font, which we will do in a few moments, we say,  
“YES! Here I am, Lord. Open to your Spirit. Let it be in me.

Even if you’ve never been formally baptized, or don’t remember if you have, you are God’s beloved child—by birth alone! You can touch the water and be touched. Here I am, Lord, open to your Spirit.

Melt me, mold me, fill me, use me. Uh oh!

### **III. BELOVED**

For, ultimately, what we are doing in this holy moment, is remembering, and reminding ourselves, whose we are.

**16-17** The moment Jesus came up out of the baptismal waters, the skies opened up and he saw God’s Spirit—it looked like a dove—descending and landing on him. And along with the Spirit, a voice: “This is my beloved Son, chosen and marked by my love, delight of my life.”

Talitha Arnold urges us not to take that lightly. This declaration from Heaven about who Jesus is, who we are, and whose we are.

“This is my Beloved.”

That’s the new name Jesus heard as he came up from the waters of the Jordan.

Mark and Luke, in their Gospels, also record Jesus' new name-- "Beloved." As the river's cool waters washed away all the dust and sweat from his body, so must have that voice of God wash away the doubt and confusion Jesus had about who he was and what he was to do with his "one wild and precious life" (to quote the poet Mary Oliver).

It's a great story for the second Sunday of a brand new year. As you begin 2017, what new name do you need or want to hear in your "one wild and precious life?"

What keeps you from hearing that new name? How can being part of a faith community help "clean out your ears"--or your mind or your heart or your soul?

I invite you to consider such questions as you worship this Sunday. Our "Renewal of Baptismal Vows," is a time to recommit to the lives and ministries to which God calls us. A time also to feel the touch of cleansing water. And yes, a time to hear once again God call our name: "Beloved."

And consider also, what difference it might make in *your* life, if every morning of 2017 as you got out of bed, you believed--just for a moment--that you heard what Jesus heard that day: "This is my Beloved."

What difference would it make that day if everyone you met you called "Beloved?"

What if, as a church or a country or a world, we regarded all people as "Beloved of God?" No easy task, to be sure. It's why we gather for worship every week--to hear again God call our name, Beloved, and in that hearing, to be able to know others as Beloved, too. Martin Luther King, Jr. called it "the strength to love."

Now, more than ever, we need such strength--as individuals, as a church, and as a human community. See you at the Font, all you Beloveds! (Talitha)

### **IV. REMEMBER WHOSE YOU ARE!**

“Beloved children, chosen and marked by my love, delight of my life.” God extends the invitation to us. And we say? “Uh oh!!”

But also, “Here I am, Lord, open to your Spirit.” If we are truly open, truly willing to be led by God in this new year, we can only do so with faith and courage.

And by holding fast to what we *most* know to be true: That we are, in the depths of our being, God’s *beloved* child, walking with Jesus, led by the Spirit. We are One in the Spirit, with *all* God’s creatures and never, ever, left alone or forsaken.

“Here I am, Lord. Here You *are*, Lord. Let’s do this! Together. Amen.