

## **Waters of Hope**

Matthew 3:13-17

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January 12, 2020

Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan, to be baptized by him. John would have prevented him, saying, “I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?” But Jesus answered him, “Let it be so now; for it is proper for us in this way to fulfill all righteousness.” Then he consented. And when Jesus had been baptized, just as he came up from the water, suddenly the heavens were opened to him and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, “This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased.”

This is the Word of the Lord.

**Thanks be to God.**

Many of you, no doubt, have heard about Greta Thunberg, the child who sparked a movement. In August of 2018, at the age of 15, she began spending her school days outside of Sweden’s Parliament building with a sign that read in Swedish, “School strike for the climate.” In the year and a half since then, her popularity and activism have increased exponentially, sparking a movement that has held multiple protests around the world with over a million students participating. She has spoken before the United Nations with passion and poise, even being named Time’s Person of the Year in 2019.<sup>1</sup>

But this rise to fame has also led to increased name calling and insults to be thrown her way. Many attacked her because of her Asperger's (which she calls her super power) and others because of her age. Some have called her “ridiculous” and

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<sup>1</sup> Bio taken from [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Greta\\_Thunberg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Greta_Thunberg)

that she has “anger management” issues.<sup>2</sup> And very recently, famous actor and singer, Meatloaf, called her “brainwashed” for believing in climate change.

The reason I am pointing out these name calling incidents is to show how she responded. She does not always respond to these incidents but when she does, she does not insult back. When Meatloaf called her brainwashed she maturely went on to say, “It's not about Meatloaf. It's not about me. It's not about what some people call me. It's not about left or right. It's all about scientific facts. And that we're not aware of the situation. Unless we start to focus everything on [climate change], our targets will soon be out of reach.”<sup>3</sup>

In the face of mocking from famous and powerful people, she does not cave, she does not quit. She instead focuses on her purpose and her calling. She leans into the identity she has taken on of fighting for climate change. She does not let the name calling change her identity or her purpose.

Where does the power of name calling come from? Have we faced instances where we have been called names that have brought us down, making fun of our class or race or job or looks? Have we called ourselves names that have degraded our identity, too fat, too skinny, too poor, too loud, too this, too that? Names have power but only as much power as we give them. If we do not know our identity we may be willing to let other names begin to define us. If we do not understand our calling then we let these false names start to become our worth. Names have the power to drown out our true identity and calling.

At the same time, names also have the power to bring us up and refresh us. Can you think of a time in your life when you received just the right compliment that changed your day and made you smile? Can you think of a time where a loved one told you just the right thing to give you the courage to keep going forward? Have you ever used positive self talk in order to prepare yourself for something bigger than you thought you could handle? Sometimes names can refresh us and cleanse us with living water, water that is able to give us courage or hope or power.

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<sup>2</sup> Twitter engagement with President Trump

<https://www.businessinsider.com/greta-thunberg-donald-trump-twitter-bio-person-of-the-year-2019-12>

<sup>3</sup> Meatloaf and her reaction

[https://loudwire.com/greta-thunberg-meat-loaf-response/?utm\\_source=tsmclip&utm\\_medium=referral](https://loudwire.com/greta-thunberg-meat-loaf-response/?utm_source=tsmclip&utm_medium=referral)

Names have the power to lift us up or throw us down. So much so that even Jesus comes to the waters of the Jordan searching to be named and claimed in baptism. Now there is much debate about why Jesus needs to be baptised and he states that it is to fulfill all righteousness. But I wonder if in the naming and claiming waters of baptism that perhaps Jesus also needed to hear that he was beloved, that he was a child of God, that God was pleased with him. This naming that happens in baptism, that we are to be called God's beloved, is a naming that supersedes all other names. It gives us worth, it gives us love, it gives us comfort, it gives us encouragement, it gives us identity and calling.

So we can learn from Greta and from Jesus who lean into their true identities and true callings, not listening to the naysayers and the haters. Because our baptismal identity, an identity that can never leave us nor forsake us, is beloved. It requires nothing from us. There are no rules or stipulations. We are simply loved. Baptism is the symbol we in the church use to remember this naming and claiming love of God in our lives. In baptism we are named God's beloved and we are claimed as part of the family. This identity was there before we were baptised, and it will live with us long after we remember what the word even means.

What would be different in your life if you stopped using all the names given to you by society to define you and give you purpose and instead leaned into the only permanent identity you have, the identity of being God's beloved. God has named you and called you. The story of Jesus' baptism shows us the truth of our belovedness, that nothing in heaven or on earth can stop God from coming to be with us. In our baptism we remember that we are beloved children of God named and claimed as members of God's family.

So today, as we remember the baptism of our Lord, come up from under the water of all the names that have been holding you down, and take a deep breath of fresh air, let the Spirit of God descend on you. Listen to the words spoken directly to you today straight from the mouth of God, "You are my child, my beloved, with you I am well pleased." Know today that through Jesus you are made beloved, this is your identity, this is your calling, this is your hope and salvation, go and live as one deeply loved.