

Epiphany 1B, St John's Olney, 7 Jan 2018  
The Reverend Henry P McQueen  
Genesis 1:1-5; Ps 29; Acts 19:1-7; Mark 1:4-11

S.D.G.

On this cold winter day permit to begin our conversation with a poem entitled:

**The Summer Day**

Mary Oliver

Who made the world?  
Who made the swan, and the black bear?  
Who made the grasshopper?  
This grasshopper, I mean-  
the one who has flung herself out of the grass,  
the one who is eating sugar out of my hand,  
who is moving her jaws back and forth instead of up and down-  
who is gazing around with her enormous and complicated eyes.  
Now she lifts her pale forearms and thoroughly washes her face.  
Now she snaps her wings open, and floats away.  
I don't know exactly what a prayer is.  
I do know how to pay attention, how to fall down  
into the grass, how to kneel down in the grass,  
how to be idle and blessed, how to stroll through the fields,  
which is what I have been doing all day.  
Tell me, what else should I have done?  
Doesn't everything die at last, and too soon?  
Tell me, what is it you plan to do  
with your one wild and precious life?

These words of Mary Oliver speak to the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, and speak to today – “Tell me, what is it you plan to do with your one wild and precious life?”

This is a time when, for many, new year resolutions become our focus. We might become obsessed with going to the gym, losing weight, or giving up some bad habit. We may decide that this is the year for a new job, decluttering the house, or seeking the promotion we so badly desire.

In short, we look at ourselves in a mirror and decide the view is not so great. We only see short comings, and as a result we want to change our appearance, our habits, ourselves. But the view in the mirror reveals that we are no less than a child of God, created in the image of God. The view in the mirror is beautiful.

“In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. And a voice came from heaven, “You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.””

We hear those words and view them as being said to Jesus; and that is true, but they are also being said to us. We are children of God, created in the image of God, and God is saying to each of us “you are my child, a beloved, and with you I am well pleased.

We may look in the mirror and see a hundred reason to change, God sees us, as we are, and sees a hundred reasons to call us God’s beloved. God sees us not as we are in ourselves, but as we are in Christ Jesus.

I had the privilege many years ago to listen as someone shared their memories of their baptism with me. I met him in the hospital and during our conversation, as he spoke from his heart, he explained that he and his mother were in church one Sunday when the pastor said it was time for baptisms and anyone who the spirit was calling to be baptized should come forward. As a surprise even to himself he got up to be baptized. This church did a full immersion baptism – in the pond outside – and there was snow on the ground. My new friend was not scared of the cold water or the dunking he was about to experience; those who went before him were shocked by the cold and quickly sought out warm dry clothes. My friend said he felt very much at peace, with no worries, and not at all cold, in fact he was warm. He said that when he was raised from the water there was a light in the sky, and the next time as he was raised from the

water he saw a dove; the heavens opened for him. He had witnessed a thin space where the heavens had opened.

This happens for each of us at baptism, the heavens open and God's light shines upon us. Whether we hear these words or not, God says to each of us 'you are my child, my beloved, and with you I am well pleased.'

We can carry these words with us, to fortify and strengthen us and prepare us to live our lives to the fullness that God intends.

Many of you are aware the athletes prepare for events through visualization, you may have even done so yourself. For example, a track sprinter visualizes the event and competes and wins all in their mind even before taking their place on the starting line. They visualize the starting pistol going off, they visualize each step of the race, how it feels and how it looks and sounds. This image gives them strength during the actual race.

How would our lives be different if we could visualize the heavens opening and God saying to each of us 'you are my beloved'? How might we live our lives differently if we carried in our hearts the sight and sound of God calling each one us God's beloved? It is not a stretch to visualize that because it has happened and is happening. God is looking upon each one of us and saying 'you are my beloved.'

Strengthened by those words, "Tell me, what is it you plan to do with your one wild and precious life?"

Amen,