

# **Sermon on Sunday 10 January 2021**

## **by Rev. Wendy Sellers**

*Readings: Psalm 29; Mark 1. 4-11*

In the olden times, our alarm went off at 6.15am on workdays. Yuk! What a horrible thought!

One positive thing about our current situation is that things are a bit more relaxed in the mornings, because my husband, Dale, works from home. And being sort-of retired, I no longer have to spring out of bed ready to face the day, but can take things at a more leisurely pace.

And so, on Tuesday morning, I was lying in bed thinking about what I might need to talk about in this morning's sermon on the baptism of Christ, because I was cosy and this was better than getting up.

Dale was already up and eating breakfast in the dining room, which is below our bedroom. Suddenly, I heard my husband's voice: "You're such a good boy. You're the best boy in the whole world".

I knew immediately that our much-loved son, Richard, hadn't popped round in breach of regulations. Dale was talking to our dog, Albie.

I knew this for sure because this is something which happens almost every morning, so I could picture the

scene in my head. Dale's sitting at the table eating his cereal. Albie's leaning against his leg. As Dale spoons in cereal with one hand, he strokes Albie with the other. Every now and again, Dale breaks off from reading the papers on his iPad to tell Albie what a 'good boy' he is.

Dale isn't praising or rewarding Albie for good behaviour. He's telling Albie that he 'is' a good boy. Not that he's 'been' a good boy.

Of course, Albie often gets told he is a 'good boy', as part of our attempts to teach our former street rat some manners. For example, when we go for walks Albie has a tendency to hurl abuse at other dogs, in what I suspect is extremely vulgar Romanian. Each time we get past a dog without incident, Albie is told he's a 'good boy' because he's done what we are teaching him to do.

But Dale's loving praise at breakfast is completely different. It's an affirmation that love does not have to be earned afresh each time – Dale's simply expressing his love of our dog.

Today, we hear in the Gospel reading God telling his son Jesus Christ that he's a 'good boy'. God's words are much more formal: "This is my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased", but the sentiment's very similar.

Let's remember that this event lies at the very start of Jesus' ministry. He hasn't done anything yet to earn God's praise, as far as we know.

If God had chosen to shout out these words at the trial of Jesus, or as Jesus hung on the cross, then we could feel that Jesus had earned them. Yet, at this point, at his baptism, all Jesus seems to have done is lurk about amongst us, being human.

"But", you may say, "Jesus was perfect, so he fully deserved God's words".

Now I'm going to suggest something that may seem a bit shocking. I think it unlikely that Jesus got through 30 years on earth without making some mistakes. You and I know that this happens whether we want it to or not. We accidentally say or do something which upsets or even harms someone. We get angry or emotional and regret that afterwards. We frequently don't do something we really ought to have done. And we all make those mistakes, all the time.

Jesus was a fully paid-up member of the human race, so inevitably he will have done those things, too. Otherwise, he wasn't human. Because humans just don't say, do, think the right thing all the time – even when we try to.

Doing what seems to be the right thing can still have a negative impact on someone. It's our universal condition. And it's one Jesus chose to share with us.

Yet this is the moment that God decides to publicly tell Jesus how much he loves him. "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased". Before his ministry gets started.

God is not saying, "If you do what I want, I will love you". He is not even saying, "I know what's in your future, and I love you for what you are prepared to do in my name".

He's expressing unconditional love and support at that moment. No strings, no provisos.

Whether or not Jesus is perfect is actually irrelevant. What he is, is 'beloved'. And those words are not for the crowd, but for Jesus, personally. They are to affirm Jesus, not to launch his new ministry.

Many of us are baptised and there is no doubt that baptism is a very special and wonderful thing. But it is, after all, one moment. And it can only happen once in a lifetime. Fortunately, what you and I know is that God's blessing is on-going and continuous, whether you are baptised or not. It's not a one-off.

Even before Jesus started his ministry, we know there were signs of God's love and care. We've heard all

about those over Christmas. Throughout Jesus' ministry there are also constant signs that God the Father was with him, and that God the Father approved of him and loved him.

It's the same for each of us. Each of us is loved by God. Continuously. And it is not a love we earn. It is not a reward for good behaviour. It is not based on us following the rules.

It just is.

Sometimes we are more aware of it than at other times. But we are beloved by God from before our birth, through life, through death and on into eternity.

At the beginning, I talked about a particular incident on Tuesday between Dale and our dog. Do you think that Dale just tells Albie he's a 'good boy' on Tuesdays? Or only at breakfast time? Of course not. Albie is told this lots of times each day – indeed almost every time they see each other. Dale even has a selection of ditties he sings to Albie, for when words just aren't enough.

I know things are rough for many of us at the moment. We need to feel God's loving presence more than ever. Please allow God to comfort you with these words.

'You are my child, the beloved; with you I am well pleased.'

Today and through this week, take this thought with you. That God loves you and approves of you every single moment. And definitely not just at breakfast-time on a Tuesday.

God says, 'You are my child, the beloved; with you I am well pleased'.

Amen

