

A Few Simple Words
based on the song "You Say" by Lauren Daigle

Mark 1: 9-11

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 take delight."

There is an urban legend about the writer, Ernest Hemingway. When someone asked him if he could tell a story in only a few words he simply said: "For sale. Baby shoes. Never worn." Since then, there have been many who have tried to distill their own life story into a few words such as, "Life is one big editorial meeting." or "Found on Craigslist: table, apartment, fiancé." Or "Family portrait. Everyone smiles except me." Sometimes all you need is a few words to get the point across. Sometimes it doesn't take much to get to the core of what we are really feeling.

In the beginning God spoke a few words. "Let there be." Then there was light and land and creatures, all formed out of the waters of chaos. The hills rose performing anthems of praise. The waterfalls danced with cascading joy. The earth spun on the tip of love's axis. And then came God's favorite part: us. And God delighted in all creation speaking a few words again: "It is so, so good!"

But over time something went sideways. We began listening to other voices. We tried to fill the emptiness inside. Maybe we even forgot who we are. But something fell out of rhythm. Our worth became based on our accomplishments. We found belonging by proving ourselves. And those original few words that that formed us? Well, other things became more important and we lost sight.

I keep fighting voices in my mind that say I'm not enough
Every single lie that tells me I will never measure up
Am I more than just the sum of every high and every low
Remind me once again just who I am because I need to know

Skip forward to a scene by a river. Where a prophet is baptizing whoever is willing, when Jesus shows up. And as Jesus emerges from these topaz-colored waters, God's Spirit rips open the sky and rushes down to tell him a few simple words, "You are my beloved child in whom I take delight!" A few simple words that everything else flows from. Before Jesus preaches, or teaches, or heals, or performs anything miraculous, the affirmation comes. Why? Because the deepest truth there is, is that we have always been loved and belonged long before any of us felt the need to prove it.

Now, if you are anything like me there have probably been moments in life when guilt or shame or failure told us the complete opposite: that we aren't delighted in or valued until we do this or that well. Or that we don't belong until we become something or someone else. And these voices are loud. I mean, some of God's beloved children have been told this by our society. Others have been told this by members of their own family. Some have even been told this by the church. But none of it is true. God's makes God's point in a few simple baptismal words. "You are my beloved child in whom I take delight." And our job? Our job is to receive it, trusting it is true.

The only thing that matters now is everything you think of me
In you I find my worth, in you I find my identity
You say I am loved when I can't feel a thing
You say I am strong when I think I am weak
And you say I am held when I am falling short
When I don't belong, oh you say I am yours...and I believe...what you say to me.

What if we all believed it? And I mean, not just said it because we are supposed to, but truly, in the core of who we are, believed it. Would there be any walls at our borders or barriers around our hearts? Would there be such a thing as white supremacy or segregation, phobias or hunger? Would any group need to resort to violence like we saw last Wednesday if we all truly believed we were loved?

When I was doing homeless ministry, I kept hearing the name Brennan Manning. Brennan Manning was a catholic priest who left the priesthood, wrote several books about struggling with addiction which caused him to live on the streets. But whenever he would share his story, it always orbited around the expansive love of God. He once said that "In the forty-eight years I've followed Jesus. In the thousands of hours of prayer, meditation, silence and solitude; over those years, I am now utterly convinced that on judgement day the Lord Jesus is going to ask us one question and only one question: 'Did you believe that I loved you?'"

After a lifetime full of blessings and brokenness, victories and failures, it always boils down to a few simple words.

Taking all I am, and now I'm laying it at your feet
You have every failure, God, you have every victory [Ooh-ahh]
You say I am loved when I can't feel a thing
You say I am strong when I think I am weak
And you say I am held when I am falling short
When I don't belong, oh you say I am yours...and I believe...what you say to me.

So may our worth and work be distilled into these simple words:
You are a beloved child. You are delighted in. You belong and have gifts God uses to bring justice and compassion into our world.

It's what God has been saying ever since the beginning. And our job? Maybe our job is to shape our life around it...as if it is the deepest truth there is.

...And I believe...what you say to me...