

Year B* Epiphany I* The Baptism of Our Lord* 2006*
Rick Lawler* Blowing Rock "Jesus Loves Me"
Sunday, January 8, 2006

A wise man came to visit me this week and gave me an epiphany. Which is entirely appropriate because the season of Epiphany began Friday night.

This is how it happened. I was talking with a friend. I was complaining. I was complaining about the God of much of the Bible. Complaining about the God of the Old Testament who is so often destroying people, who is so often filled with wrath and rejection of Israel for their failings. But I was also complaining about the God of the New Testament who seems so ready to condemn people for not believing the correct things about Jesus.

My friend asked me, "What kind of God do you try to give to people you talk to." I said, "A God who is love, a God of mercy, a God who is always there with us through good and bad. A God who challenges us but doesn't desert us when we fail to meet the challenge."

Then my friend asked, and this was the Epiphany. "Why don't you give yourself the same God you want to give others?"
Why don't I give myself the loving, merciful, challenging, always present God, I want to give others?
Ouch.

My friend exposed a character flaw of mine. namely, refusing myself the good things I willingly give to other people.
Epiphanies are not always easy and fun.

I was immediately taken back in time over twenty-five years ago to this very feast we are celebrating this morning, the Baptism of Our Lord. I was sitting in a little mountain Church on the western slope of the Colorado Rockies. I think the name of the town was Rifle. Rifle, Colorado, isn't that a perfect name for a town on the western slope of the Rockies?

The preacher read the gospel we have just heard, emphasizing these words.

And just as Jesus 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."

The preacher paused and asked, "Do you hear these words? You are my son, the beloved, with you I am well pleased. Today God is saying these words to you.

Begin with your name and hear these words addressed not only to

Jesus but to you." Then he said my name as an example. "Rick, you are my son. I am delighted with you." (Then he chose a woman's name and said, "Sue, you are my daughter, I am delighted in you.)

Immediately within me I recoiled. That *God* loved me I could accept on some level. But how could *God* be delighted in me? I knew myself. I knew my sins, my mistakes, my fears. How could *God* be delighted in me?

The preacher was a friend and as we drove back to Denver I put that very question to him. He said, "Rick, *God* not only loves you but delights in you. You are God's son. How could a Father not delight in his son. That's where we begin."

Time and again I fall away from that good news. I don't know why. I forget that I am loved and delighted in and so I stop loving and delighting in myself. Then all manner of trouble begins.

But the good news is that we are loved and delighted in no matter what, simply because we are God's daughters and sons.

The tough news is that we must learn to treat ourselves as the beloved, as the delighted in.

As long as I refuse to love and delight in myself I am just not ready for the fullness of joy that God has in store for me.

As long as I am willing to give others a good and loving God and not receive this same good and loving God I remain stunted in my spiritual growth.

So, does this fit for you?

Do you give yourself the love and acceptance that you willingly give to others?

Are you as gentle with your hurting soul as you are with others?

Do you forgive yourself as you forgive others?

Today we celebrate a truth, a truth many of us have yet to realize, a truth made manifest in our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

God loves us because we are God's beloved daughters and sons.

Because we are God's beloved daughters and sons. God is delighted with us, just as we are. with all of our strengths and failings.

There's a poem that has been running through my head since the wise man visited me last Thursday, it's one I'm sure your familiar with.

**Jesus loves me, this I know
for the Bible tells me so.
Little ones to him belong
they are weak but he is strong,**

**Jesus loves me when I'm good,
when I do the things I should.
Jesus loves me when I'm bad,
though it makes him very sad.**

**Jesus loves me, he who died,
Heaven's gates to open wide.
He will wash away my sin.
Let this little child come in.**

**Yes, Jesus loves me.
Yes, Jesus loves me.
Yes, Jesus loves me.
The Bible tells me so.**

Jesus has opened the gates of heaven, right here and right now. The question is not whether he will let us into love and delight but will we allow ourselves to go in. Will we allow ourselves to go into God's love for us. Go into God's delight in us.

Here we must trust in God not only to love and delight in us but to give us the willingness to receive God's love and delight. We simply must rely on God for everything.

Someone is going in today. Into the waters of love and delight. We're going to baptize Aspen this morning. May we all deeply receive God's love and delight and show Aspen the way to joy.