

The Beloved, by Daniel H. Kuhn, Jr. E5050206
2 Peter 1:16-21 and Matthew 17:1-9
Elon Community Church, UCC, 6 February, 2005

Albert, nine years old, was the son of an older couple in a church I served a number a years ago. As an only child, Albert received the full brunt of attention from his parents. This was the second marriage for each parent. The father had attained upper-upper management status in an internationally-known company, so Albert and his family lacked nothing. Albert was polite and quiet, the perfect little man. At the same time, he had lots of friends who enjoyed his vast smorgasbord of toys.

When Sue and I were alone, we didn't refer to Albert as Albert. We called him "the beloved." He was the cherished and cherubic long-awaited offspring of a loving couple. Albert worked on and achieved his God and Family scouting award and later the rank of Eagle Scout. He was a willing volunteer and always ready to do what was asked of him. Albert, the Beloved, was an example of totally-focused unconditional love.

In the scripture lessons you heard this morning, there was a quote from a voice from heaven saying, "This is my Son, my Beloved, with whom I am well pleased."¹ Jesus was the focus of total unconditional love from God. Jesus had taken three of his closest disciples up Mt. Tabor in Galilee. There, before their eyes, his appearance changed. His face shone like the sun and his clothes became a dazzling white in what we term the Transfiguration.

The disciples knew they were in the presence of someone special. Jesus' ministry was affirmed with the appearance of Moses and Elijah, the quintessential leaders of the Hebrew people. The words from the cloud echo the words spoken at Jesus' baptism, the beginning of his ministry, "This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased."²

Jesus is not the only one who is beloved of God. As the writer of Ephesians points out, because of Jesus—the way he lived his life, the way he pleased his Creator God— all people have been brought into the full light of God's love. God's grace is bestowed on us in the Beloved,³ and we become beloved also.

Did you hear that? You are beloved. You are rooted and grounded in love. You were drawn from an eternity of God's love and put on this earth. You are loved by God while you are here. After your death you will return to the eternity of God's love— forever! What a revolution there would be if everyone could see themselves as beloved by God!

If each person could feel that love around him or her, there would be no need to hurt others, no need to raise oneself up by putting others down, no need to force others to live according to one's own doctrines or beliefs.

Our Companions in Christ groups heard these words of the late Henri J. M. Nouwen in last week's session. They are titled, "On our First Love" and come from a lecture he gave at Scarritt-Bennett Center in Nashville, TN, February 8, 1991. I invite you to close your eyes and hear these words.

Listen to what God is saying to us: You are my child. You are written in the palms of my hand. You are hidden in the shadow of my hand. I have molded you in the secret of the earth.

¹2 Peter 1:17 and Matthew 17:5

²Matthew 3:17

³Ephesians 1:5-6

I have knitted you together in your mother's womb. You belong to me. I am yours. You are mine. I have called you from eternity and you are the one who is held safe and embraced in love from eternity to eternity. You belong to me. And I am holding you safe and I want you to know that whatever happens to you, I am always there. I was always there; I am always there; I always will be there and hold you in my embrace. You are mine. You are my child. You belong to my home. You belong to my intimate life and I will never let you go. I will be faithful to you. The spiritual life starts at the place where you can hear God's voice. Where somehow you can claim that long before your father, your mother, your brother, your sister, your school, your church touched you, loved you, and wounded you— long before that you were held safe in an eternal embrace. You were seen with eyes of perfect love long before you entered into the dark valley of life... The spiritual life starts at the moment that you can go beyond all of the wounds and claim that there was a love that was perfect and unlimited, long before that perfect love became reflected in the imperfect and limited, conditional love of people. The spiritual life starts where you dare to claim the first love— love one another because I have loved you first. (See 1 John 4:19)⁴

In a few moments you will be able to share in the communion of the Lord's Supper. You will be able to spiritually take in the beloved Christ through bread and cup. The eternal love of God will be reaffirmed within you. You are beloved. God circles around you and enfolds you in loving embrace. Hear God say the words to you, "You are my beloved."

⁴*Companions in Christ Leader's Guide* © 2001 by Upper Room Books