

The very first time I held my firstborn child,  
There was a feeling deep in my being I had never felt before.  
It was as if there was this invisible thread between the  
little baby girl in my arms and my heart  
and I never knew-- before that moment-- that this thread existed.

And as the busy days and sleepless nights passed  
I realized that what I felt,  
was a love that was very different  
from any other love that I had felt before.

And when daughter number 2 came along,  
I did worry, just a wee bit, if I could/or would possibly love her  
as much as I did my older daughter:  
and much to my delight:  
that love connection was there just as strong and just as wonderful  
as it had been for my firstborn.

And so it was, with each successive child—4 daughters all together—  
this string from my heart to theirs,  
continued and continues to multiply and grow  
now with the birth of each of my 6 grandchildren!

Our reading today could be read as a story  
about a Father's Love for his Son.  
Before he began his public ministry,  
before he did anything recordable:  
God announces that Jesus' is his Beloved Son...,  
and God is delighted!.  
God loves Jesus

as a Father loves his Son.

Any one who has a had at least one child

... knows this feeling,

It doesn't have to be your own biological child,

it just needs to be a child that you care for.

Because when you love a child

you can feel the love literally swelling inside your heart,

and sometimes, you can even feel as if your heart is going to break

because there is so much love.

This is how I imagine God is feeling about Jesus in our story today...

and isn't it beautiful!

Yet...Jesus is not an only child!

All of humanity, all people from all time have been God's children...

including yourself...

Can you imagine God feeling that way about you?

*"You are my beloved Child...in you I take delight!"*

Sadly many of us can't.

Throughout the ages in the Christian Tradition,

the name 'Father' has been given to God more than any other name.

Unfortunately though, most of the time,

this Father God is a Father who loves his children very conditionally:

This Father God will only love his sons and daughters

if they are "good enough"

or say the right words,

or use the right name for God,

**or go into the right worship building...**

**Unfortunately this Father loves some of his children more than others,  
and some of his children.... he loves not all!**

**And the problem is, and it really is a problem...  
is that this is not what Jesus taught!**

**Jesus knew that his Abba...his Daddy...loved people  
beyond any human made boundary or law.**

**And I think that is the biggest difference  
between Jesus and you and me...  
is that he really believed it...  
He absolutely believed it when he heard the voice say:  
*You are my beloved Son,  
in you I take delight...*  
and Jesus lived his life in and this love and delight.**

**And we don't...not totally...  
Well...maybe we do kind of...sort of... on our better days...  
when we feel we have earned God's love....**

**But we rarely live our lives believing that God loves us,  
and trusting that God actually likes us...that God finds us delightful!  
and that, my friends, makes all the difference in the world!**

**Our invitation today is to let go of anything which keeps us from believing  
that God loves us at least as much as you have ever loved a child:  
If we can feel this much love towards a child,**

**the Holy One could feel that much,  
and I believe...so much more...**

**So right now, close your eyes and hear the voice from the Heavens say to you:**  
*You are my Beloved child.*  
*in you I take delight. PAUSE....PAUSE....*

**Ladies and Gentlemen...**

**it is absolutely true.**

**Each and every person ever born,  
including ourselves, is God's own beloved child.**

**God delights in every person ever born at least as much  
as any parent has ever loved their child and then a lot, lot more...  
You know, don't you that the word Gospel means "Good News"?  
The reason the Gospels are indeed good news is because God's love is not  
conditional on us being good enough or bright enough  
or belonging to the right group.**

**God loves us, because that is who God is, not because of who we are....  
because God IS love....**

**Now, a lot of us haven't been taught about God in that way...  
Many of us, perhaps most of us have grown up thinking about God  
more like Santa Clause than the a Presence that can  
unconditionally love all people...**

**Think about it:**

**You know you have a Santa Claus kind of God if the "he" in the following  
song could be replaced with either Santa or God:**

**‘He’s making a list, he’s checking it twice he’s going to find out if your naughty or nice.**

**or again from the next verse:**

**He sees you when your sleeping, you knows when your awake. he knows when you’ve been bad or good, so be good for goodness sake.’**

**If you can imagine those lines sounding like God....  
you need to reimagine God because that kind of God  
is not the Abba God of Jesus!**

**So, today I’d like to offer you a different way to reimagine God:  
St. Teresa of Avila: a Carmelite nun from the 16<sup>th</sup> century offers this picture:  
St. Teresa said:**

**God is like a mother who is watching her little one with great love  
while the child is learning how to walk.**

**The mother never scolds and punishes her child for falling down.**

**When the little one does fall down, which of course the child will because  
every child falls as they learn,**

**the mother rushes to the child, picks her up,  
kisses the hurt knee and sends her on her way.**

**and So it is with God...**

**God watches us with great love as we learn to walk in life.**

**When we fall down: when we haven’t been kind or compassionate or loving,**

**God rushes towards us,**

**not away from us,**

**picks us up and swoops us up into God’s arms...**

**kisses where we are hurt and sends us on our way again saying:**

*“You are my Beloved Child. In you I take delight.”*

**Yes...God is a loving Father and I dare say a loving Mother...  
and for this we can say “thank you!” amen.**