

Remember Who You Are!

A sermon preached in Glebe Road United Church

Baptism of Christ Sunday

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Ambury Stuart

Isaiah 43: 1-7

Luke 3: 2-6, 21-22

The sun rises on the African plains, and the animals all make their way to Pride Rock. The old baboon Rafikki hold Simba high in his outstretched arms for all the animals to see. This is the day of Simba's baptism. Simba will one day be the king of all the animals. And as Simba is held aloft by Rafikki the clouds part and the hot African sun breaks through. And anyone who knows anything at all about scripture quietly whispers the words of Luke 3:22: "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased."

The Lion King is a parable about the unique time in our lives when we are blessed by our Creator and called to become the person that the Creator has dreamed for us to become; to be the person we really are. We in the church think that happens at our baptism but the Creator is never restricted by our traditions and forms. The Creator dreams about the life of all of God's creations. As the Psalmist writes, "My frame was not hidden from you, when I was being made in secret, intricately woven in the depths of the earth. Your eyes beheld my unformed substance. In your book were written all the days that were formed for me, when none of them as yet existed. (Psalm 139: 15-16) For young Simba in the Lion King, God's plan is truly awesome – Simba has been born to become the king of all the animals just as his father Mufasa is at the beginning of the movie. To know such a thing at the beginning of your life is a huge burden to carry and sometimes we cannot bear the pressure – that's what happens to Simba, who is driven away from his home after his father is killed by his uncle Scar who becomes the new king, and tries to have Simba killed as well. The little cub escapes and grows up in a beautiful but foreign land. He tries to forget his Creator's dream for him; he tries to forget who he really is.

But the dream of the Creator is not to be denied. Simba hears his father's voice from the night skies, just as his father told him he would: "Simba, remember who you are. Remember!" Simba tries to ignore the voice, but events will not let him forget. The old baboon Rafiki who baptised Simba and presented him to the other animals learns that Simba is alive and confronts him "Who are you? You don't know who you are but I know who you are. You are Mufasa's boy. Your father is still alive because he lives in you. But because you have forgotten who you are, you have become someone who is less than you can be. So remember who you are, because when you forget who you are then you forget your father and you forget your Creator.

And Rafiki's words echo in our own ears when we forget the Creator's dreams for each one of us. Each of us is created in the image of God, and each of us has a dream to live. We hear the words of Isaiah directed now, not the chosen people living in exile in Babylon, but to each one of us, the chosen people living in Toronto:

*1 But now thus says the Lord, he who created you, O Jacob, he who formed you, O Israel: Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine. 2 When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you. 3 For I am the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior. ... 4 Because you are precious in my sight, and honored, and I love you, I give people in return for you, nations in exchange for your life. 5 Do not fear, for I am with you;*

So remember who you are. You are the beloved, chosen of God. You are called to be one of God's people.

But so often we forget. The pressures of the world are often too much for us. The burdens of being the person God has called us often to be seem to be too much for us, and we yearn to be free of them. The world is only too happy to help us forget the dream of our Creator by replacing the dream with any number of idols and lies. Soon we succumb to the ads and jingles telling us that we are inadequate if we don't have this brand of toilet paper; that we won't measure up unless we have a particular body shape or a use a particular cell phone; that we just must pay the extra cost of this particular hair colouring or that special latest fashion. And it is then that we need to listen to the deep voice of James Earl Jones, who is the voice of Mufasa, booming at us from the starry skies – "Remember! Remember who you are". You are the beloved child of God, blessed and called to be the person that you already are in the mind of the one who created you. Remember! Remember who you are.

As we begin our new year 2010 together let us try to remember our baptism, remember who we are called to be by God's dream for us. In a few minutes the children will be offering you a solid token of your baptism. Please accept it as a reminder of God's dream for you and for your life. Put it somewhere that you will see it often. I have stuck my token on the front of my day book for 2010, along with the single word, "Remember". If anyone sees it they will probably think that I'm pushing myself to finish my "to-do" list, or reminding myself that I can't stop until my work is finished. And that would be right if I were Simba, someone who had set the bar too low; someone who is called to greatness and is willing to settle for mediocre. When Mufasa told Simba to "remember" this is what he meant.

We must not forget however, that it is also possible to set the bar too high; it is possible for our ambitions or more often, the ambitions others have for us, to drive us crazy trying to do something we can't do, or be someone we can't be, and someone we wouldn't even want to be if we knew everything that would be involved. If you are like that, and I know I am like that, then "remember who you are" is a reminder to remember that we are all children of a God who knows us better than we know ourselves and who loves us anyway; we need to remember that we have created by a God who does not call us to attempt something we cannot do, and who does not call us to do something that would break us or destroy us. For people like us, Mufasa's reminder to "remember who you are" means that we need to be gentle with ourselves, to take time to smell the flowers, appreciate the beauty that is all around us, to work hard certainly, but also to remember our limitations, to remember that we are not God, and that God does God's job much better than we ever could.

When I was a teenager, I was convinced that God had called me to be a scholar. I mapped out my life for the next 50 years, and decided that if I were going to be a great scholar I would need a Rhodes Scholarship. I'm not sure why I picked that particular award – probably because I hadn't heard of any others up to that point in my life. In any case I pushed my self through the rest of high school and through university. I would have to win the gold medal, be recognized in student government and achieve distinction in athletics, which is almost impossible to do as I later found out, but it was also amazing how close I came to actually doing all those things. But in spite of it all, I didn't win the scholarship and I was crushed. It took me over a year to "recalibrate" myself (this seems to be the word for this week!) It took me much longer to understand that I wouldn't have liked my life very much at all if I had been successful in my quest as a teenager. God had called me to other things; God knew me better than I knew myself.

So remember who you are as we move together into a new year. Don't sell yourself short and be distracted by the whims and temptations of the world, but don't drive yourself crazy either by trying to be someone

you aren't. There is a balance to be found here, a golden mean to the sought. God knows us better than we know ourselves, and God will lead us along the right path if we will listen and watch and follow. As we remember our baptism, remember too that God loves us, we are redeemed by God, saved from ourselves and from the world by God. If we remain faithful to God's call every day then at the end of each day we can lean into God's loving embrace, confident that whatever we have achieved will be enough, and whatever mistakes we have made will be forgiven.

For these great gifts we give thanks to God..

Amen