

Bishop's Charge to Synod  
1 March 2025

**Beloved**

*“The gifts Christ gave were ..... to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ.” (Eph 4:11-13)*

We gather together today as the Diocese of Aberdeen and Orkney, very aware that we are desirous of both unity and maturity in Christ, so that we can serve in his name those that come to our churches, and those in our neighbourhoods and communities.

If, as described in Ephesians, we want to be mature, as individuals or as a diocese, attaining to the fullness of Christ, then we could just try to push on forward, doing the best we can.

Or, we can pause and remember where we began, be reminded of our ‘factory settings’, if you will. Taking pause enables us to pay attention to some fundamental things – including who we are in relation to God and each other.

So, the search for unity and maturity takes us back to the beginning of the chapter in Ephesians, where it describes there being:

“one Lord, one faith, one baptism”

It is our one, common, baptism that I want us to consider today.

One baptism – a shared experience, something that we all have in common. Later in the service we will renew our baptismal promises, and be sprinkled again with water, accompanied by the words:

“Remember your baptism”.

What is it then that we are remembering?

We might wonder if we are being encouraged to remember the event itself.

For some of us, especially those who came to Christian faith as adults, there may be a memory of the day of baptism itself. So it is for me. I remember where I was, and who was there. I remember how warm the water was, and how very public it all seemed.

Many of you will have no memory your baptism, you were likely an infant, brought to church by adults, those who loved you and wanted you to grow into the Christian faith.

In many of our churches there are those who have worshipped in the same building all of their lives. So, although they have no memory of their baptism, they know exactly where it took place. Regularly people point out the font in their church to me, saying 'it was here...'. This is one of the reasons they are so committed to the survival of their congregation and building. (Baptisms, confirmations, weddings, and then baptisms again, are all located in that place.)

Coming to faith as an adult, baptism was, for me, first of all, about intellectual assent, about what I had come to believe about God and Christ and Salvation. When intellectual assent is fervent, there is emotional content to belief and so feelings are involved.

Even so it took me quite some time to understand that when we are baptised we share in the death and resurrection of Jesus. Made part of the body of Christ, we are sharing in his life and so his baptism. We share in God's "*glorious grace...freely bestowed on us in the Beloved.*" (Eph 1:6)

So, in and through our baptism, we hear the same words spoken to us as were spoken to Jesus in the Jordan:

*"You are my beloved."* (Luke 3:22)

This might take some time – years even – to sink in for us. That you, and I, are God's beloved.

Through your baptism, you are caught up into that Trinitarian movement when the Father speaks words of love to the Son, and the Spirit descends. You – now being in Christ, part of

Christ's very body, have the loving words of the Father spoken to you, and upon you the Spirit descends.

But being beloved is not just a theological truth, it is relational and emotional.

We will all have had experiences of watching one person love another, with words of tenderness and care, with touch that is gentle and caressing.

We see parents with their beloved children, we see those who are adults who love each other, we see love expressed to the elderly, and at the point of death.

Moments of such beloved-ness are holy moments, for we know that those who live in love live in God.

And seeing how one person is loved by another, we match this behaviour, how could we hurt one beloved of another?

Sadly, we know when love is absent, when words are harsh, and resources for life are withheld. Ephesians encourages us to move beyond such behaviours so that:

*"We must no longer be children, tossed to and fro and blown about by every wind of doctrine, by people's trickery, by their craftiness in deceitful scheming." (Eph 4:14)*

Being 'beloved' is what we live in to, what we aspire to fully understand. And treating others as beloved is the call to *'love one another with mutual affection'*. (Rom 12:10) This is St Paul again – in every letter he writes, he puts the genuine and practical loving of each other at the heart of the life of the body of Christ, the church. This was as much a challenge at the beginning of Christianity, as it is a challenge for us today.

"Beloved" – that is what you are, that is who you are. And as I hope you know and experience, this unconditional love makes all the difference in the world.

And what is true for you is just as true of the person you are sitting next to in this chapel today, and of those you can see as you look out over the space, and of those you will sit at table with in synod.

So then, who are we to treat each other in any other way than as God's beloved? This is the standard that we hold before us.

Understanding each other as "Beloved" is foundational to our relationships in church. When we fail, we recognise that we do not just damage our relationship with God, but with each other. So when we gather we confess our sins to God and *'to our fellow members in the Body of Christ.'*

And when we pray the Eucharistic prayer, we ask God to:

*Help us, who are baptised  
into the fellowship of Christ's Body  
to live and work to your praise and glory;  
may we grow together in unity and love.*

We don't pray these things every now and then, but every time we gather around God's table. These prayers are essential to who we are.

All of this comes from understanding each other to be beloved, and to be those living into our connectedness in the power of the Spirit.

This changes everything.

In the letter to the Colossians, St Paul writes:

*So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. (2 Cor:5)*

This viewing of each other differently is the first step towards reconciliation and unity.

*So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view.*

.....

*Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come:*

*The old has gone, the new is here!*

*All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation:*

*that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ,  
not counting people's sins against them.*

*And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. (2 Cor 5:16-20)*

This way of looking, regarding each other, is the beginning of reconciliation. When we see each other as beloved our ways of being together are transformed, and we together become part of the new order of unity and maturity, that is built on reconciliation and love.

So, when in a few minutes you are asked to remember your baptism:

Remember you are beloved

Remember that those around you are in the same way, unconditionally loved.

Remember these things through everything you do and say today, and tomorrow, and the days to come.

Let it effect how you behave, how you are, who you are.

So finally I say to you all, the beloved of God, and my beloved, as we begin this day – using the words of St Paul:

*“And over all these virtues put on love, which ties everything together in unity.” (Col 3:14)*

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