

Known and loved by God (Isaiah 43.1-7 and Luke 3.15-17,21-22)

'Some of us like our names, and some of us, perhaps, don't. But they are ours and they belong to us. When a child is adopted, sometimes it is the only thing they bring with them. No clothes, no toys, nothing but their name; it is all they've got and it is therefore very important to them.

Sometimes our names may be said with care, delight and love. Sometimes they may be said with hatred, sadness or disappointment. Some of us will be used to using shortened forms of our names; when we were children, we knew we were in trouble if our full names were used!

We can perhaps imagine the warmth and sincerity of God's voice, the voice from heaven, when Jesus came up from of the water and received the Holy Spirit. 'This is my Son, my beloved son, and with him I am well pleased'. Can you imagine God saying the same of you? Close your eyes for a moment, and listen to the words again, beginning with your name: '...you are my beloved child and with you I am well pleased'. Know the warmth and the love of God's voice. What is it like? A strong and forceful voice or one that is gentle and calm?

There's no right or wrong answer to that, by the way. But here is a truth: that we, each and every one of us, are God's beloved, and God wants us to know and receive that love. Sometimes we may not feel loved, or even worthy of being loved. Sometimes we may feel quite the opposite. But the message of Scripture, Jesus' message, is that God wants us to know that no matter what we have done, no matter what our circumstances, no matter what we currently think: we are God's children, we are forgiven and loved, and all we have to do is reach out and receive that love. '

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The words that we speak to one another are powerful and can change our lives in either a good or a bad way. Kind and truthful words can really build us up can't they?

I wonder what words you have heard that have made you feel really good inside. Who would like to share some of the nicest words that someone has spoken to you?

(Receive a few responses)[If people are shy about sharing, share something kind and truthful that someone has said to you to get the ball rolling!]

You know, we all need to hear kind and truthful words..... that is Father God's desire for us. Sadly we often hear negative and unkind words spoken to us and these words are often easier to remember than the kind and truthful words aren't they?

When Jesus was baptised in the River Jordan over 2000 years ago, at the very beginning of His public ministry, God spoke some amazing words to Him. Listen to what He said to Jesus:

"You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased." (Luke 3:22)

"You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased."

God spoke the truth to Jesus that He was God's own Son; that He was loved and that Father God was pleased with Him. What incredible words of kindness and love to hear.

These words must have really built Jesus up, providing a firm foundation for His ministry.

It's great when people speak encouraging words to us, but you know the best words that we could ever hear are the words spoken to us by God, because His words are always true and will always build us up.

When we turn to Jesus, choosing to follow Him, Father God says to us that:

We are His son or daughter. (1John 3:1)

We are loved by Him. (Romans 5:8)

We bring pleasure to Him. (Psalm 147:11)

These are the most powerful words that you will ever hear in your life because God speaks them, and they are true.

So how do we hear Father God speaking these wonderful words to us?

- Most of us will not hear Father God speaking to us in a voice speaking from heaven like Jesus did at His baptism.
- Most of us will hear Father God speaking to us in our thoughts as we sit quietly with Him, or as we read our Bibles and suddenly the words seem to touch our hearts.
- Other times we may hear His words spoken to us through another Christian.
- All of us have different moments when they feel closed to God. Some of you might feel close when playing music, doing a jigsaw, reading, stitching and sewing, being in your garden or in the beautiful country side.

The most important thing is that God wants us to hear these words and hold onto them through our lives.

So let's be very quiet for a moment.....you may want to shut your eyes as you become aware that Father God is here with us today, by His Spirit. (PAUSE)

Hear Him speak His words of truth to you today: (Speak the following words slowly over people)

- You are my son
- You are my daughter (PAUSE)
- I love you, totally and unconditionally (PAUSE)
- You bring me pleasure (PAUSE)

(Source <https://www.allageworshipresources.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/SHT133-The-best-words-you-could-ever-hear.pdf>)

Now I would like you to pick up your little paper and take a moment to think about what God values most about you. (play some music here)

Take this and pop it into your pocket, as a reminder that you are part of his plan and God the father is pleased with you.

(Silence)

Now take your second paper and take a moment to think about the person next to you. What special skill or personality trait is it that you think pleases God about your neighbour. This might be something that you see every day or something that you observed today. (play some music here)

Pass your little note to your neighbour. After you had a chance to look at this and pop it into your pocket.

We are all part of his bigger plan and God's love shows and shines through you. Pass it on!

"Don't be afraid, because I have saved you. I have called you by name, and you are mine (Isaiah 43:1)

"You are my child and I love you. I am very pleased with you." (Luke 3:22)

Hold onto those words today and tomorrow and for the rest of your life.