

More often than not I have a tendency to think the internet is a place that we would all be better off avoiding, despite our basic dependence upon it on a daily, if not minute by minute basis. However, there are those moments...those moments when you're like this is what the internet is here for. The perfectly timed tweet, the ridiculous meme, the funny animal video, and in the case of this week...the random pep talk generator. What is this you may ask? Well, it's exactly what it sounds like, a system to generate a random pep talk for you to get you through the day.

I did this with my family the other day when all of the were in categorically abysmal moods and it gave us a laugh and lifted our spirits for at least a hot second. What it is, is four columns consisting of different beginnings, middles, and ends of affirmations, and you combine them at random to make a pep talk. To show you how this works, we're going to need a little bit of participation here, which yes we can still do virtually. So! If you have my phone number, do me a favor and text me four numbers between 1 and 18 and we'll build a couple together. While we're waiting for the texts to roll in, I'll give you a couple of examples of the ones we got with my family. Mine was: Ace, every thought you have rains magic, for reals. Kristin's was: Fact: that sparkle in your eye is a rainbow factory according to CNN. So, let's see what we've got.

There can be no doubt, some of them are ridiculous, some of them are weird and don't make a lot of sense, but some of them come out just chef's kiss perfect. They make you laugh and they give you that little bit of oomph for the rest of the day, for whatever task is ahead. That's the point of a pep talk, right? It's meant to acknowledge your fears or your anxieties or your stressors about a situation and then get you pumped up with your own awesomeness, your own capabilities to take it on. It's meant to give you that like "Ooo-rah" feeling like you're the star quarterback about to run onto the field for the big game. A pep talk is meant to make you feel like you can take on the world, even in the face of staggering circumstances. A pep talk is, honestly, what Jesus gets this morning in our gospel lesson.

We spent a lot of time in Bible study this week pondering one question: did Jesus know from the beginning that he was God's Son, that he was the Messiah, that he was going to be the salvation of the whole world at the cost of his life? We batted around a lot of different ideas, but at the end of the day, one thing became clear, whether he knew or not did not diminish the weight, the intensity, the enormity of the task he was about to take on. Because the thing is, it's one thing to *know* you have to do something, it's a whole other thing to then actually go out and *do it*. I mean, we all have those tasks on our to do list. The email you don't want to send, the errand

you don't feel like running, the chore you don't want to do. Imagine having the thing on the list be: go be the Messiah. Preach the gospel. Be God's Son. Die on the cross for the sins of the world. Yikes. I mean, that's a to do list no one really is going to want to tackle.

So here we find Jesus, on the brink of the beginning, whether in full knowledge of what lies ahead, denial of what lies ahead, or completely ignorant of it. He like so many others stands on the banks of the Jordan and in solidarity with the humanity he has come to earth to love, he allows John to lower him below the water and baptize him. It doesn't matter that Jesus himself is the one who will baptize with the Holy Spirit and fire. It doesn't matter that he is more powerful than John. It doesn't matter that John isn't worthy to untie Jesus' sandals. What matters in this moment is for those he has come to save witnessing Jesus' beginning, his public declaration that he is one of them and one with them. What matters is that in the waters of baptism Jesus' ministry starts. At least, *publicly*, that's what matters. What matters in this moment, *privately*, what matters to Jesus in this moment is an entirely different story.

Jesus' baptism in Luke is almost a passing thought, like a throwaway line in a novel. All these things happened, and oh yeah, Jesus was also baptized. There is no lengthy back and forth negotiation with John. John

isn't even really a player in this once Jesus arrives on the scene. Once Jesus is there, this becomes a story all about Jesus, God, and the Holy Spirit. We find Jesus praying after his baptism and in this moment, everything changes. I mean, imagine what Jesus' prayer sounds like here. He's probably nervous, anxious, maybe a little excited, empowered, curious, driven, scared out of his mind for what lies ahead. Imagine pouring all of that out to God, finally giving voice and vent to the weight of your heart. Because again, even if he knew what he was embarking on, it's a whole different story finally taking those first steps out into the unknown of reality.

It is into that prayer that Holy Spirit quite literally breaks through. The heavens open and the Holy Spirit descends upon Jesus like a dove, a visible, physical, tangible reminder that he is not alone, that he will not be walking this path solo, but with the ever present comfort of the Holy Spirit. If that wasn't reassurance enough, a voice comes from heaven... Now in Luke, unlike in the other gospels, this seems to happen only within Jesus' hearing. This isn't some bold proclamation for all the crowds and half of Judea to hear. No. This is a one on one, intimate conversation between parent and child. God's voice echoes only to Jesus, "*You are my Son, the beloved; with you I am well pleased.*" Imagine it... Jesus hasn't even really *done* anything yet, hasn't even gotten started on this Messiah path and God

is already telling him that he's done a good job. It's like a stamp of approval at the starting gate.

In this moment, God is telling Jesus not only who he is but how is known. God is helping Jesus see the fundamental truths of his identity. You are my Son...you belong to me, I am with you, I will watch over you as a parent to a child. The beloved...I love you, I cherish you, I value you. With you I am well pleased...who you are, exactly as you are is who I am pleased with. You don't need to change, you don't need to tweak things, you, Jesus, my Son, exactly as you are, is who I have called to do this job and I believe you are well suited for it. Go forth. Go get 'em. Ooo-rah!

When you look at it that way, we realize that in this moment of Jesus' life, our entire theology of baptism is laid out in crystal clear clarity. That moment, when we are presented before God, either by our parents, by a loved one, or by ourselves, the Holy Spirit descends amongst us, descends upon us, and promises to seal us with hope and accompaniment forever. In that moment when we are baptized, our names are known upon God's lips, exactly as we are, exactly as we are going to grow to be. We are proclaimed as beloved, cherished, created, valued. God knows that we will journey through life and our identities, our names, how we see ourselves may change, but the fundamental truth of us, beloved children of God will

forever remain the same, no matter where life takes us and no matter who we discover ourselves to be.

In the same way, just as this moment, this assurance is God's sending commission to Jesus as he embarks on his public ministry, our baptisms serve the same purpose. "So let your light shine before others, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven." Go out, go ye therefore, go get 'em. The gospel lies in our hands to send out into the world, to proclaim in the world, to breathe into the world, and our baptisms are the first moments when God tells us, you've got this. You can do this. I believe in you! You were, quite literally, made for this!

Because while sure, we aren't seeking to go out into the world and be the Messiah. Our task is not nearly so taxing as that, our commission, our ministry is still daunting. Love your neighbor. Speak out for justice. Stand up against oppression. Practice compassion. Breathe forgiveness. Give and receive grace upon grace. None of these are small tasks. They take work. Work that far too often we think we aren't equipped for. Work that we think is above our pay grade or far too lofty for us to attempt.

We can't feed 5,000, but we can feed the hungry. We can offer substance to those who are in need, who know what it is to hunger for more than righteousness. We can't walk on water, but we can extend a hand out

to those who feel like they are drowning, drowning under the weight of hopelessness, despair, and loneliness. We can ride the waves with them so that they know they don't have to try to keep their heads above water alone. We may not be able to heal someone with a single word, but we can advocate for decent health care for all people, we can advocate for access to medicines and vaccines and other health measures that will keep folks safe. We can't tell someone to get up and walk and live, but we can be open and honest about the importance of mental health, for self-care, for the importance of compassion for those who suffer. We might not be able to tell as good of a story as the Good Samaritan, but we can stand up for those in our world who are called other, who are shunned because they are different, and give them a space to be loved for who they are.

When we are washed in the waters of baptism, we are washed for this work. We are given grace and love and forgiveness and hope and we are called to go out and do something with them. We are told we are beloved and we are sent out to love others. There can be no doubt that the task is daunting, that the to do list is long, but today as we dip our fingers in the water and remember the one who created us and named us, we also remember the one who gives us the ultimate pep talk for the gospel. You are mine. I love you. I believe in you. **AMEN!!!**