

1st Sunday - Beloved



The extreme intensity of the moment is unmistakable. In this painting, *The Baptism of Christ* (2005), David Zelenka seems to suspend time for us so we can share something of this baptism in the swirling waters. Jesus rises from the depths of the river, tenderly supported by John. It is a holy, Spirit-filled moment as the swooping, inquisitive dove and the luminous faces of both men make plain. Zelenka cannot, of course, paint the divine voice but there is something in Jesus' face which suggests the enormity of what he is hearing - just as the whorls of blue and ochre and pink curl and coil round his body, so God is embracing him with words we all long to hear: "You are my beloved" (Mark 1.11).

The word "Beloved" is a frequent one within the writings of the hugely admired Roman Catholic priest and theologian Henri Nouwen (1932–1996). Like so many of us, he struggled to believe that he himself was beloved by God. But ... "we must dare to opt consciously for our chosenness and not allow our emotions to seduce us into self-rejection" he wrote. "The truth, even though I cannot feel it right now, is that I am the chosen child of God, precious in God's eyes, called the 'Beloved' from all eternity and held safe in an everlasting embrace..."

Today...

...help us to feel your embrace, O God,
and know ourselves beloved by you.

Amen