

## The Beloved

The Baptism of Our Lord. (The First Sunday after the Epiphany). Year C, RCL. Luke 3:15-17, 21-22. January 13, 2019.  
The Shared Ministry of Our Saviour, Salem and Trinity, Alliance in the Diocese of Ohio. The Rev'd Jerome H. (Kip)  
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When I was baptized, at the moderately clueless age of nine and a half, the heavens did not open, but the doors of the church did. And it was inside those doors, both literally and figuratively, that I came to know the one whom the voice from heaven in today's Gospel reading calls "the Beloved." The word Beloved is the designation of Jesus, and of God in general, that is closest to my heart.

But long before my baptism the Beloved was walking with me, sitting beside me, waiting for me. I had been experiencing intimations of his presence since at least the age of five. So it was with astonishment and yet deep recognition that I read, in 1982, the following poem by Gjertrud Schnackenberg, which has become one of my favorites. Remember, as you listen, that Scripture tells us the Holy Spirit leads us to cry Abba! Which means Father, or, more literally, Daddy. And there is a bit of imagery in this poem that renders it particularly appropriate to be read in the Carnation City of Alliance, Ohio. The poem is called:

### Supernatural Love

My father at the dictionary-stand  
Touches the page to fully understand  
The lamplit answer, tilting in his hand

His slowly scanning magnifying lens,  
A blurry, glistening circle he suspends  
Above the word "Carnation." Then he bends

So near his eyes are magnified and blurred,  
One finger on the miniature word,  
As if he touched a single key and heard

A distant, plucked, infinitesimal string,  
"The obligation due to every thing  
That's smaller than the universe." I bring

My sewing needle close enough that I  
Can watch my father through the needle's eye,  
As through a lens ground for a butterfly

Who peers down flower-hallways toward a room  
Shadowed and fathomed as this study's gloom  
Where, as a scholar bends above a tomb

To read what's buried there, he bends to pore  
over the Latin blossom. I am four.  
I spill my pins and needles on the floor

Trying to stitch "Beloved" X by X.  
My dangerous, bright needle's point connects  
Myself illiterate to this perfect text

I cannot read. My father puzzles why  
It is my habit to identify  
Carnations as “Christ’s flowers,” knowing I

Can give no explanation but “Because.”  
Word-roots blossom in speechless messages  
The way the thread behind my sampler does

Where following each X I awkward move  
My needle through the world whose root is love.  
He reads, “A pink variety of Clove,

*Carnatio*, the latin, meaning flesh.”  
As if the bud’s essential oils brush  
Christ’s fragrance through the room, the iron-fresh

Odor carnations have floats up to me,  
A drifted, secret, bitter ecstasy,  
The stems squeak in my scissors, *Child, it’s me*,

He turns the page to “Clove” and reads aloud:  
“The clove, a spice, dried from a flower-bud.”  
Then twice, as if he hasn’t understood,

He reads, “From French, for *clou*, meaning a nail.”  
He gazes, motionless. “Meaning a nail.”  
The incarnation blossoms, flesh and nail,

I twist my threads like stems into a knot  
And smooth “Beloved,” but my needle caught  
Within the threads, *Thy blood so dearly bought*,

The needle strikes my finger to the bone.  
I lift my hand, it is myself I’ve sewn,  
The flesh laid bare, the threads of blood my own,

I lift my hand in startled agony  
And call upon his name, “Daddy, daddy”—  
My father’s hand touches the injury

As lightly as he touched the page before,  
Where incarnation bloomed from roots that bore  
The flowers I called Christ’s when I was four.

In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.