Beloved – notes on an essay question:

‘I will call them my people, which were not my people, and her beloved, which was not beloved.’
Discuss the significance of the epigraph to the novel Beloved.

A. PLANNING

1. Untangle the question

Are there any clues in the question?

a) The quote itself needs untangling - where is it from?
   Romans 9:25
   and continues ... and it shall come to pass, that in the place where it was said unto them, Ye are not my people; there shall they be called the children of the living God.’

b) Break down the question
   • who are the people who are not accepted and beloved? - Sethe, Beloved
   • why were they not loved, accepted, nurtured? - Sethe is not accepted by the community, Beloved thinks she is not loved by Sethe

   • the 2nd part of the quote is about acceptance and being loved, including in terms of religion. - Sethe is accepted by the community and is released from Beloved’s influence
   • Beloved needs to know that she was loved by Sethe, and her reasons for killing, although how does this affect her?
   • religion - Baby Sugg’s sermon - about black people’s religion, being accepted etc (religion as tool of the slave owners - the meek shall inherit the earth).

c) Decide on main sections of your essay:

d) Make essay plan including quotes for important points (attached)

e) Write a rough draft
ESSAY PLAN

A INTRO

Untangle question - what is it asking? Do you know where the quote comes from and how it continues. Also, explain that epigraphs are important - Morrison’s signature, final remark upon how to read novel. Explain the sections (briefly!) of your essay. NB it is complicated!

B Beloved

• Why does she return? - she returns, angry that Sethe killed her, believing she is alone, unloved
• What does she need from Sethe? - Sethe must explain her actions:
  - how she got her name (was this an act of love?)
  - Sethe’s mothering instincts - her difficulties in being a good mother
  - the killing itself - why?
  - Sethe’s guilt when Beloved returns - the role reversal
• When Beloved is accepted, what happens?

C Sethe

• How is she not accepted by the community?
  - no-one warns her of Schoolteacher
  - anger at her pride, behaviour at the funeral etc
  - her fears about the carnival
  - people’s reactions (Janey?) to hearing Beloved has returned

• How does she becomes accepted?
  - Denver asks for help

• Why this acceptance is important?
  - NB Baby Sugg’s sermon
  - saves her from killing again (Denver)
  - saves her from Beloved

D Religion

• Why are slaves denied their own religion?
• How does this affect their sense of self?
• Baby Suggs - what happens when they find their own religion?
• How does this link with themes of acceptance of self, identity, love ...

E Conclusion

Generally, with what sort of tone (negative or positive ) is Morrison endowing Beloved, with this quote?