

“Zoe’s Blood”  
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St. Luke’s Episcopal Church – Anchorage, Kentucky  
Trinity Sunday – 26 & 27 May 2018  
Isaiah 6:1-8; John 3:1-17

Today we celebrate the Holy Trinity, the only Sabbath in the Church’s calendar when we celebrate a doctrine. Since I love you so much, we’re not going down that rabbit’s role today. You’re welcome.

Instead, I’d like to tell you a story about a little girl named Zoe, who had very special blood. Her doctors checked it each year, because Zoe had some risk factors for a rare and potentially dangerous childhood disease. One year, they took a sample, and when they tested it, something strange appeared: a type of white blood cell unlike anything they’d ever seen.

This warranted further study, and the more the lab techs and researchers looked at it, the more excited they got. They discovered it could cure the common cold, kill cancer cells, and reverse a whole host of illnesses, like Alzheimer’s. It gradually became clear that Zoe’s blood could heal anything, completely and permanently. Nothing in medical history came close to the mystery and the meaning of Zoe’s special blood. A whole world of hurt would become a thing of the past.

When Zoe’s pediatrician got the news, she called Zoe’s parents and said, “Please come to the office as soon as you can. I have great news.” They went, and Dr. Hope explained the discovery and told Zoe, “With your blood, we can heal everyone on Earth.”

This was more than Zoe could really take in. She was, after all, a little girl, so as small children often do, she got right to the point. “OK. I’ll do it,” she said, “but how much will it hurt?” Dr. Hope replied, “Oh, Zoe, we’ve done this for years. You know the needle pinches for

a few seconds, and then everything's OK." Zoe said, "I'm not worried about the needle, doctor. I want to know how much it hurts to die."

At first, the adults in the room were confused, but suddenly it dawned on them that Zoe thought – the world being such a big place with so many sick people – Zoe thought that they needed all of her blood.

Unfortunately, the story about Zoe's very special blood is a fable. Scientists haven't found a cure all, and aren't likely to. But there's truth in the story about Zoe, about her willingness to sacrifice her life for the sake of others.

On this Memorial Day weekend, we honor and celebrate the men and women of our armed forces who, throughout the centuries, have given the last full measure of devotion. We like to think that they offered their lives for the ideals of freedom, a way of life we need to cherish, not take for granted. And to a certain extent, that's true. But from the many books I've read, and more importantly, the many conversations I've shared with veterans over the years, the real motive that causes them to risk life and limb is the well-being, the survival, of the people standing to either side of them. Some of them did crazy things. Sometimes, love makes you do crazy things.

Yet much as we admire those brave men and women, no matter how inspired we feel about the fable of Zoe's amazing blood, nothing compares with the love of Jesus. He came down from heaven, a place of perfect peace, to dwell in a world of violence and chaos. He left a realm of glory, where there is no suffering, and endured all the pain of the human condition, and much more. Jesus gave up an exalted home where war doesn't exist to be born in obscure poverty, raised in the backwater of Nazareth, a total nobody as far as the world was concerned.

It was, by human standards, a crazy thing to do; by divine standards, the only thing that made sense.

Never has anyone sacrificed so profoundly. His kindness, his generosity, motivated solely by unconditional love, transcends thought and imagination. We can only catch glimpses of what Jesus did, what it means, but even that slight vision proves more than enough to give us hope for the future, peace in the present, and a Way of life whose heart pulses with the power of Christ's love.

Jesus came to be with us, to know what it was like to be human, to give healing to all, a real life Zoe, except that instead of healing all physical illness, Jesus heals all spiritual dis-eases. And he did it not for a chosen few deemed worthy – for none can be worthy on their own merits. No, Jesus came for everyone, sinners all – the careless and the selfish; the mean and the apathetic; those who enjoy lies and wickedness, and those who try to resist those temptations yet consistently fall short. He came for you and me and everyone we know and everyone we don't know.

That seems too good to be true, just another heart-warming yet illusory fable like the one about Zoe, and many people can't accept it. Even people who've made a commitment of faith and strive to be good followers of Jesus sometimes find it incredible. We look in the mirror and can't see how Jesus could accept us, because we live in a world so full of judgment that the idea of forgiveness seems unrealistic. We're in a world so infected by spite and cruelty that mercy seems like a fantasy. We live in a diseased culture so divided, so insistent on the nonsense that people get what they deserve – nothing more, nothing less – that the notion of reconciliation and grace seem terribly remote.

Yet we're witnesses to the fact that grace happens. Love happens. It's in our blood, pouring forth from the Communion chalice into us, ignited by the Spirit's breath, bright red like a flame. It surges through us, in moments ordinary and extraordinary, healing us and others, making whole what's broken, rejecting the cancerous foolishness of a prideful world, restoring the wisdom of humility before God, and awakening hope for transformation.

To borrow from Paul Tillich, "We cannot transform our lives, unless we allow them to be transformed by that stroke of grace. It strikes us when we are in great pain and restlessness. It strikes us when we walk through the valley of a meaningless and empty life. It strikes us when, year after year, the longed-for perfection of life does not appear, when the old compulsions reign within us as they have for decades, when despair destroys all joy and courage. Sometimes in that moment a wave of light breaks into our darkness, and it is as though a voice were saying, 'You are accepted. *You are accepted*, accepted by that which is greater than you . . . *Simply accept the fact that you are accepted!*' If that happens to us, we experience grace. After such an experience we may not be better than before, and we may not believe more than before. But everything is transformed. In that moment, grace conquers sin, and reconciliation bridges the gulf of estrangement. And nothing is demanded of this experience, no religious or moral or intellectual presupposition, nothing but *acceptance*."

To the extent that we accept the fact that Jesus accepts us, we accept the love of Jesus, and when accept that love, we like, Isaiah, are able to overcome our sense of unworthiness, be purified of our sin by the fire of the Holy Spirit, and can answer, "Here am I. Send me." When we accept that we are accepted, the love of Jesus pours through us to a hurting world, bringing healing, hope, and peace – a lot like Zoe, which – in case your Greek is a little rusty – is a name that means "life."