

“Baptized In Christ”
The Reverend Allison Caudill
St. Luke’s Episcopal Church – Anchorage, Kentucky
8th Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 13C) – 3 & 4 August, 2019

Hear this, all you peoples; hearken, all you who dwell in the world, you of high degree and low, rich and poor together.

Our psalmist today sounds pretty confident that whatever comes next is very important news, news that will be relevant to all sorts of people, the rich and the poor, the important and the unimportant, the wise and the dull. The words of the psalmist sound pretty positive, mouths speak of wisdom, hearts meditate on understanding, riddles are played upon the harp and there is no need to be afraid of the evil days when they come. That sounds like good news, like we’re about to hear a message of hope!

But what follows? We can never ransom ourselves, or deliver to God the price of our life;

For the ransom of our life is so great, that we should never have enough to pay it, in order to live for ever and ever, and never see the grave.

Now, wait. All that talk about wisdom, all this understanding of the heart, and this is the conclusion? We are all gonna die?

As if that news weren't bleak enough, the psalm continues- for we see that the wise die also; like the dull and stupid they perish and leave their wealth to those who come after them. Their graves shall be their homes forever. They cannot live forever. They are like the beasts that perish. If that is the psalmist's idea of a Good Word, maybe he needs to take some more preaching classes.

Or maybe not. Maybe, if we look closely, there is a good word here, even in all this death and perishing. We can never ransom ourselves, or deliver to God the price of our life; for the ransom of our life is so great, that we should never have enough to pay it. The gift of our life, of ourselves, of the power to choose who we will be and how we will live, is a gift too great to be repaid. The image of God, the creation of each of us is so great a wealth that we cannot earn it. We cannot repay God for what God has made, for the great works of God's hands that surround us and witness to his glory every moment of every day. We rich, we poor, we of high degree and low, we wise and we dull, we created and beloved things, cannot repay the love that has been born in us. We can only respond. Like the author of the epistle this morning reminds the Christians in Colossae, we have been raised with Christ into a life that is greater and more permanent than any treasure we can store, any legacy we can leave behind, and a life like that calls us to live differently, to think differently, to look at the world differently.

Last night, Father Michael and this parish had the privilege of baptizing Jon and Vivien Jacoby's granddaughter, Gracelyn. Baby Gracelyn was dressed in a tiny white dress and little white shoes. She was fast asleep in her father's arms until the moment she felt the water of baptism washing over her brow and through her curls. Her parents and sister, her proud grandparents, a couple of new godmothers and other family and friends and the people of St. Luke's surrounded her in response to the love they bear her, in response to the love of Christ in their lives and in their hearts. The first, the greatest, the most profound response in a person's life to the Good News of God is baptism. Choosing to be baptized, choosing to bring our children to be baptized, is to answer the call to live differently. In baptism, we become living members of the body of Christ. We become dead to sin and Alive again in Jesus. We in baptism begin to live the life the psalmist prays for. The gift his heart meditates on, the wisdom his mouth proclaims, the life that we cannot repay, is ours. We are raised! This is the Good Word, the Good News, the Gospel. But first, like our psalm and our epistle remind us today, we have to die. We have to put to death whatever in us is earthly. We have to set our minds on the kingdom of God, on those things which will be revealed to us in Christ. In order to live, we have to die.

It is uncomfortable, I know, to talk about, to think about death, especially if we have the privilege of young voices and restless wiggles amongst us. Our brothers and sisters in other Christian traditions think us strange for baptizing our children, when they are so new in the world, when they don't have the language or the understanding to know what that funny bath is all about. But I think that's why it is so good, so right to baptize our little ones as well as our elders and everyone in between. Because this is all very strange. It is difficult, and confusing. The new life we receive in Christ is one that demands a big response from us, demands of us things we cannot do on our own. Our baptismal covenant is a laundry list of daily, moment by moment tasks, a list of promises to see the world like God does. In our baptism, we are prevailed upon to become a part of something greater than ourselves, to spread to the world the incredible news that Christ is all and in all.

The miracle of this new birth is that it comes with a new body, a community, a family. The Body of Christ, the church of God throughout the entire world, is constantly, in every moment, experiencing death, and birth, and renewal, and rebirth. The Body of Christ is being raised up again and again every time a child is washed in the waters of baptism. The babies do not understand. We don't either. Like the first disciples of Jesus we have more questions than answers, we have more work to do than any of us could accomplish alone. But we are never alone.

Being baptized, being raised with Christ into his body, no riddle has to be puzzled out in solitude and darkness. Our pains and our sorrows do not have to rest on our shoulders without an arm to help us stand. The differences that separate us are abolished by the renewal of our very being, leaving only the image in which we are created.

Last night, Gracelyn was brought here by the family she was born into, the people who will raise her up in faith and love. But she left this place with a family that transcends time, space, a family that is not parted by death and that will never be out of her reach. Gracelyn will never be without support, without love and prayer. She will never have to fear evil days. Every time a new Christian is born in the font of baptism, every time we walk past the font or dip our fingers in the water by the door, we are reminded that we too are never alone, that the life we live is one that transcends the riches of this world and the daily deaths that grieve us. We know the greatest news the world has ever known, and as a family we are called to proclaim with our words and with our lives that this news, this death and newness of life, is for all.

Hear this all you peoples, hearken, all you who dwell in the world. There is no longer Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and free. Christ is all and in all.