

## SERMON-Epiphany 7 (C) Baptism

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Genesis 45:3-11, 15

1 Corinthians 15:35-38,42-50

St. Timothy's (Herndon)

February 23, 2025

Luke 6:27-38

Psalms 37:1-12, 41-42

### OPENING:

I will start my sermon by saying that what I am going to say from *here*... will *sound* like a sermon, it will *feel* like the sermon, and it will *look* like a sermon.

But the actual sermon today... is the baptism... that will take place in a moment. That's the sermon, because these children (Hudson, David and Mary) represent every one of **us** in front of God, offering their witness and testimony to all of us.

That act of being presented before God  
being willing to be washed in the waters of Baptism,  
to take on this new life of faith,  
to join this thing called the church.  
That's the sermon... "beyond my poor power to add or detract."

I have quoted it before, but Martin Luther is supposed to have said once:  
"If anyone has faith, it's a baby."

That means that they, and we, are all, and will always be, children in front of God, in some way.

You and I will never be anything more than a child in front of God.  
We never really develop, mature, or graduate from that.

At a baptism, you get a glimpse of how God looks at us, what God feels like when he beholds his creation, his children.

Today's sermon then is: "if anyone has faith, it's a baby."

Now, to be sure, Hudson is NOT a baby.  
He is here out of his own volition,  
maybe with some guidance and at least a car ride from his parents.

And to be equally sure, Mary and David are babies. They are here, not out of their own volition, but because of a decision made by their parents and God parents.

But stick with the idea from that quote from Martin Luther,  
as we work our way through the Gospel,  
and I say just a little something about Baptism itself,  
before we get to the actual sermon that is today's baptism.

## **GOSPEL**

Our readings today don't feature babies or water, but they do have language around parenting (fathers) and around children (brothers and sisters).

In our Gospel, we got some impossible life advice from "Dad."  
Jesus gives us some tough instructions on how to live in this world.  
These are Eagle Scout, Varsity Quarterback, Homecoming King, Rhodes Scholar  
type expectations on us.

How do we measure up?

Last week, Ellie preached on the first part of Chapter 7, the first half of the  
Beatitudes, and Luke's Sermon on the Plain.  
She gave you an assignment to pray for someone this week. It was beautiful.  
Everyone leapt at the opportunity, immediately, very un-Episcopalian!

Just one week later, we go from that, difficult enough, task, to the graduate level  
seminar: *now* pray for someone you despise,  
if someone hits you, then turn the other cheek,  
if they steal your cloak, offer them another.

In the face of that, if we are honest, we all become sniveling children, crying  
infants, utterly dependent.... Babies.

"How dare you?" We wag our fingers at God. "That makes no sense, that's a recipe  
for disaster. People will take advantage of me."

In the undying refrain of every child in every land in every time: "That's not fair."

We are hearing the instructions wrong though.

God is not saying: "this is how I expect you to love, and I am going to judge you if  
you don't and then you don't get in the club, and you are not worthy of baptism.

God is not saying that. We project that on God because of our own relationship with  
the world and our own fathers.

God is saying: “This is how I love you.”  
I love you, even though you hurt each other.  
I love you, even though you do not forgive,  
I love you, even though you don’t share your toys.

Jesus’ Sermon is a description of how God’s kingdom work, what the playground looks like when God’s dream is enacted.

In that world, Faith then becomes the baby who aches to touch the font, who wiggles and contrives their bodies to feel the living water.

Faith becomes the toddler who comes to the communion rail and offers their little hand and yearns for the bread

We confuse that by thinking it’s cute, although it is, when we should be saying:

“Blessed are the children for they shall inherit the earth.”

“Suffer little children, forbid them not.”

## **GRACE**

A part of that simply does not want to hear that, maybe it can abide for the literal children among us but not for the adult children of God.

We don’t want to hear that.

We would rather create a club where some people get in and others do not.

The Church, in its wisdom or just by chance, landed on the practice where infant baptism would be the norm. Before that, it had to struggle with some questions:

“Does this baby deserve it?” No.

“What have they done to earn it?” Nothing.

“Okay... then maybe the parents, they can merit and achieve it on their children’s behalf.” Now, there are some saints among us who, indeed, when someone strikes their cheek, they offer the other, give away their shirt and their cloak.

But most of us, lack that spiritual maturity, and instead we make sure we protect our own, we take care of ourselves. OR, worse, we lash out, live eye for an eye.

We cannot imagine ourselves as children, as babies, worthy of God’s love and God’s superabundant grace and God’s generosity.

## **OT LESSON:**

Jesus knew this.

How? Because his father taught him, and he and his father were one.

And his life was a demonstration of that upside down logic, that ethic of love at any cost.

We don't get to hear any such story about Jesus' life today that demonstrate it. Instead, we get one today from the Old Testament.

We get the climax of the story of Joseph and his brothers.

The entire saga of Joseph and his brothers and his father is a portrait of humanity in its worst and its best, thus in its most accurate.

If you remember, Joseph's brothers leave him for dead.... all for a CLOAK... granted a technicolor, dream coat.

They don't even have the stuff to kill him, just to leave him in a pit to be killed.

They go back and tell their father Jacob, that Joseph is dead.

Joseph **is** dead to them, and the feeling is probably mutual, the brothers are **dead** to Joseph.

Fast forward a few decades.

There is nothing but a ruptured family system, broken and desiccated hearts. literal environmental degradation and desert, poverty and famine.

And God makes Resurrection happen.

God says even though you have acted like children, like babies, God's grace will make something new.

It is no accident, that Joseph has the name of Jesus' father by the way.

Joseph somehow loves the very thing that he has every reason to hate.

Sometimes on earth, there are stories of human beings breaking through like Joseph, like Gandhi, like Martin Luther King, like Jesus of course.

Where people take this teaching and they live it out in their lives

Most of the time, we are babies.

And we need to be baptized. And to remember our own baptisms, own membership in the Body of Christ, a club that has the lowest of standards and requirements (water and about 7 words) and the greatest of dreams, the highest of possibilities, in the fulness of God's love where hope and forgiveness and unconditional love are the currency.

## **CONCLUSION**

Gosh, I thought the sermon was supposed to be the Baptism, and here I went on and on and on.

Today, we are going to do something slightly different, as we prepare for the Todd suggested that we sing a hymn before the Baptism, a Lutheran tradition, in honor of the original Lutheran, Martin Luther: "if anyone has faith, it's a baby."

**AMEN**