

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ!

A baptism is something to celebrate. Whether the person to be baptized is a child or an adult, a baptism is special! A baptism is triumphant!

We hear about the celebrations of celebrities all the time, but we in the church celebrate the baptism of a person into Christ and into the fellowship of the church, sealed with the Holy Spirit and marked with the cross of Christ forever.

This morning we renew our baptismal covenant, the promises our parents and godparents made for us if we were baptized as infants, the promises we made when we were confirmed, the promises we made if we were baptized as adults. This day let us renew our commitment to Christ and to each other.

The Saturday evening before I left my congregation in Nisswa to come here as your pastor, I was privileged to baptize two people, one was an infant, the other was his father. It was a particularly moving service for the baptized, the extended family, and for me, as both were washed the water of baptism and into a new relationship as Christ's own. Baptisms are always the highlight of the ministry I am privileged to do.

Our reading from Isaiah stresses the nature of Jesus' baptism, and ours, the passage gets right to the heart of the matter "Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights."

Our reading from Acts contains Peter's dramatic speech about life in the Spirit, how God shows no partiality. It's a statement we take seriously as our baptismal promises include "proclaim Christ though word and deed, care for others and the world God made, and work for justice and peace." This speaks to me about respecting the dignity of everyone, every human being, all created by the same God who created you and me. This speaks of the reality of refugees and migrants among us, aliens as we read in the OT, and it brings this issue right to the forefront of our hearts and minds. All people, I emphasize all people, including the stranger, the alien, the foreigner, are gifts of God to us, and we are to extend hospitality to them since as Peter said in our reading from Acts "anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him."

Our gospel reading this morning has our Lord saying "it is proper for us in this way to fulfill all righteousness." The way God intends things to be, and God intends us to submit to one another in service.

A long time ago in the years before I became a pastor, I felt prodded to participate in services at a local nursing home back in California. It wasn't something I felt particularly comfortable doing, at least at first, but even as I was uncomfortable, it felt right to be there. I also felt prodded to volunteer at the ministry I've referred to before called Loaves and Fishes. One of the first times I volunteered I was asked to

lead the service group at Loaves and Fishes in prayer. I felt so out of place, but at the same time it felt right to be there, to serve the homeless, hundreds of them, in the community. I felt prodded to become a Stephen Minister, and along with several friends, all men, we went through the training program. I felt out of place, never more so than when I ended ministering to men who were dying, but it also felt right to be there, to be serving in that capacity, sharing Christ in word and deed.

In each of these ministries I've cited it's not about me and my feelings, it's about my neighbor and what I can do to serve. This is what baptism leads to, servanthood, serving my neighbor even when I feel quite uncomfortable. It's about proclaiming Christ through word and deed, it's about mission, and it's never about me.

The baptism of an infant, young person, or adult, is precious, it leaves us smiling, joyful, but we cannot know what God has in mind for newly baptized if they are nurtured in the love of God. We may never see the rest of the story, but I suspect we might be amazed if we were somehow able watch what happens in a person's life.

There are countless stories of folks who go on to lives of servanthood, stemming from the promises made at baptism and confirmation, and the commitment to Christ and his church. Now I ask you to take a moment, reflect on where your journey as a baptized disciple of Christ has brought you, what have you done in your life in Christ? How has Jesus fed you and led in your life in Christ? Have you worked for justice and peace? Have you cared for others and the world God has made? Share a moment right now with your immediate neighbor in the pew you're seated in, share a moment that has been joyful for you as you journey with Jesus.

Now look around at your sisters and brothers, give thanks that together we can celebrate our lives in Christ and look forward to even more. Because we know how the story ends but we're still traveling together. AMEN