

Acts 17: 22-31
Psalm 66: 7-18
I Peter 3: 13-22
St. John 14: 15-21

The Sixth Sunday of Easter Season 2023.

“And this water symbolizes baptism that now saves you also.”

I Peter 3: 21a

When I was a little kid, my godmother, a Miss Foster (as she was always called) sent me and my parents a children’s Bible. This children’s Bible had all the action stories in it – Daniel and lions’ den; Jonah and the big fish; the miracles of Jesus, of course; and it had the story of Noah and the ark as well...

I didn’t appreciate it at the time, but looking back, I realize that Miss Foster was doing her best to carry out her part in the baptismal covenant, that I might know Christ myself, and be fed by the scriptures... Of course, I got to know the story of Noah and the ark very well. I didn’t realize at the time that the story of Noah and the ark pops up, surprisingly, much later in the Bible, in the First Letter of Peter – within the passage which is assigned for us to read this morning, from the end of chapter 3...

In this passage, we read that Jesus Christ died for us (which we have heard so often). We might be more surprised to read that the power and effect of Jesus Christ’s sacrifice extends back through time to the dawn of humanity. Jesus Christ died for the living *and the dead*... First Peter continues, that just as Noah and his immediate family were saved physically; this is a kind of picture of what baptism demonstrates spiritually... Noah, his family, and the ark, are a hint what’s to come – a “figure” of God’s work in baptism, through Jesus Christ...

The significance of baptism is within the bigger story of Jesus Christ’s death and resurrection. Could all the Old Testament heroes have possibly imagined that the long-awaited Messiah would rescue his people – not by leading a violent uprising against the Roman army, but through Jesus’ humiliating death and glorious resurrection? Surely not! God is at work in their lives in ways they could never have expected, but the power and presence of the Living God is just as real...

In a few moments, God willing, Rowan Clement is going to be baptized. Obviously, she’s a little baby. She has almost no conception about what is going on, and is utterly dependent on Derinda and Quinn, and the rest of her family, for her survival. She does not yet know God. But let’s remember the story of Noah and his family – God is often at work in surprising ways – ways we very often don’t understand at the time, but are nonetheless real. God’s passionate desire is to draw all people to himself, and baptism is part of this process of discipleship.

Let's resist the idea of thinking that baptism is an "end;" that it is about getting "done." No; baptism is not an *end*, but rather a beginning – the beginning of a glorious new chapter in Rowan's life.

Baptism is also an incorporation into the family of the Church. This is one of the reasons why baptismal fonts are near the entrance in many Anglican churches, and many other Christian denominations. It's a kind of symbolism, or sign, that the way into the Church is through baptism... We are adopted as sons and daughters into an amazing spiritual family, the Body of Christ, extending through space and time, right to the throne of heaven...

These are the facts of the good news. Now, Rowan will have to decide for herself one day, whether or not her parents' faith and commitment become her own. For every one of us, we have a choice, whether to choose to live self-centred lives, or to pursue some other target we choose to be our god... *or...* we can choose for ourselves, to live in response to God's amazing grace and mercy and forgiveness and life, shown supremely through Jesus Christ himself.

Quinn and Derinda, Shauna and Austin, you are undertaking a particular commitment today, that with the help of God, you are providing an example, to be models of Christian discipleship, for Rowan. Just as you care for her physically and emotionally, I encourage you to pray for her, and to aim to be a positive example of living beautifully for God.

Addressing all of us present, we *all* have roles to play... In a few minutes, we too will be undertaking a vow of commitment to support Rowan and her family. We too can and should pray for her, and provide an atmosphere of Christian love and hospitality, for the months and years ahead.

Let's conclude by recalling the message of Jesus to his friends, in the gospel passage appointed for today... On the night of his betrayal, the Lord Jesus teaches his friends about the coming of the Holy Spirit in their lives. "I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you," says Christ. This is a promise – and God keeps his promises – for Rowan; for you; for me; for every one of us, adopted, into this new spiritual family...

Thanks be to God.