



Marked as Christ's Own Forever

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a sermon on infant baptism

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Psalm 145

What in the world do we think we are doing this morning? We are baptizing a baby boy. Handsome though Aidan is, he is a baby. He can't possibly even be aware of what we are doing, much less be ready for anything approaching a mature public affirmation of faith.

It's divisive stuff that we are up to. Infant baptism is one of the ideas that separates a little less than half of us Christians in this county from the rest of the Christians in our area. It is that one must be an adult to be ready for baptism.

Why would we do such a thing? Well there is scripture for one thing. When I read of several occurrences in Acts and elsewhere in the New Testament of a whole household being baptized, I take those verses to literally mean the whole household, including all children. That certainly would fit with the way it worked in those days, of the head of the household making a decision and the whole house, every man, woman, child, and even the servants, following.

Then there is Paul's reference in his First Letter to the Corinthians in which he noted that the children of a Christian couple are considered holy. This might cause some to wonder if their children would ever have a moment of conversion later in their lives, as they would always know of God's love and grace.

And if those were not convincing, there are Jesus' own words as children were gathering around him for his blessing and the disciples attempted to prevent this disturbance. Jesus said that his disciples should not hinder the children for, "to such as these belong the Kingdom of God."

Perhaps Jesus really meant, "When they grow up and understand things more fully, the Kingdom of God will belong to them," but that's not what he said. I take these words of our

stand on his behalf today and choosing life for him. He does not understand that we are joining with his parents and promising that we will help raise him to find loving God as natural as breathing.

But what we understand is that if we do our jobs that we pledge to do this day. If we all, especially Christopher and Jessica, do our part to raise Aidan in the knowledge and love of God and his son Jesus, then this is the only point in his life he will ever have in which he needs to turn away from the ways of a world disconnected from God. Oh, of course, he will do wrong. He will sin and need to ask for forgiveness. But he will never have a moment of conversion, because we trust that there will never be a time in which Aidan does not know God loves him. He may have to deal with doubts and he may have to work to draw closer to God, but so do those of us who have made a mature profession of faith.

But the point behind this baptism is that we trust in God to care for Aidan and to bring him to that day into the future when the faith in which we raise him will become his own. We trust that he will come to that day never having been fully apart from God because on this day we have trusted in God to mark Aidan as Christ's own forever.

Amen.



—The Rev. Frank Logue

slow to anger and of great kindness." The next generations will have faith if we teach them to do so. They will trust in God if we show them that we do and want them to do so too.

My relationship with God is only slightly more important to me as a person than my need to breathe. Why wouldn't I want my daughter to experience that faith as much as possible? Yes, she will make her own decisions one day, but after I have provided her as solid a footing as I know how. I would no more want to leave her faith to chance alone than I would have left her to fend for herself as an infant, like the couple in the video did their child.

But we are not talking about matters for parents alone. Scripture tells all of us to praise God to the generations that follow. That's good, because, it takes the whole church to raise children in the faith and none of us is without responsibility. In just a few minutes we will begin the baptism and you will be asked if you will do all you can to support Aidan in his life in Christ. The answer in the bulletin is "we will," but you might want to think about it before you make a promise to God you don't intend to keep.

In saying that we will support Aidan, we are saying that King of Peace will now and always keep programs for children as a priority. We don't need to do this because children are the future of the church, I don't find that scriptural at all. What I find in scripture is that children are fully a part of the church now and will continue to be so. We need to offer things for kids just as we need to offer things for all ages, as we are called to support the whole Body of Christ.

So we are doing something potentially divisive in that not all Christians will agree with infant baptism because infants do not understand what is going on. I have to admit that is true. Aidan does not yet understand what we are doing this morning. He does not understand that there is a world out there running away from God. He does not understand that we are making a

Lord at face value. It is not that children who need a seminary education. I'm the one who needs to get over myself and approach God with simple child-like faith.

I may misreading these passages and thinking wrongly that children were baptized in the earliest days of Christianity. I have to admit that there is room for me to be wrong about. Though if I am wrong about scripture, there is still church history to give some clues. We know from late second century and third century theologians like Tertullian, Hippolytus and Augustine that they assumed infant baptism to be the norm. So even if I can't prove conclusively that infant baptism dated from Jesus' own day, it certainly goes back to the late 100s, more than 1800 years of Christian practice. So rather than ask what we think we were up to, "What were those ancient Christians up to?" might be a fair question.

Later theologians, working in the Middle Ages, would sum up that earlier thought saying that there is faith poured into us as a gift from God, they called this the *habitus*, from which we get habit. Then they noted that one must awaken to this gift from God and act on it, this they called *actus*, from which we get action. The faith of the church community could substitute for the faith of a child not yet ready to make anything near a mature public affirmation of faith. The community makes the proclamation that they will raise the child in the habit of faith, so as a child grows older, they are ready and able to put the faith with which he or she is raised into action.

There is also no doubt that the early church fathers, especially Augustine, connected a child's baptism to original sin. The idea went that as a child is guilty of original sin, they need to be baptized to gain God's forgiveness for this stain left from Adam and Eve's wrong choice that day in the Garden of Eden.

In case you think we have gotten too clever for original sin, take a look around. Sin isn't very original. The world we live in is disconnected from God in a very real way. The way the world

works is counter to the ways of God whether we commit any acts of sin or not.

As one German theologian has put it,

Every human being, without being consulted, is born into a situation that is marked by a “no” to God, and by a general lack of peace, injustice, and by temptation. This situation did not arise of itself, but was created by conscious, wrong human decisions, and is constantly augmented by such decisions....¹

We are born into a world disconnected from God and that is a sinful situation whether we commit any acts of sin or not. It is important for everyone to break away from the way of the world and establish a connection with God.

No it doesn't quite make sense that we take this baby boy, Aidan, who has done no wrong and baptize him for the forgiveness of sins and initiate him into Christ's body, the church. It makes about as much sense to baptize Aidan as it would to baptize the sinless Jesus. And yet, of course, Jesus was baptized. The water of the Jordan River washed away his connections to the sinful and broken world and should outwardly his connection to the Kingdom of God in the here and now.

In that same way, we will take Aidan and decisively set him on the course of a Christian life. We will outwardly show the inward reality that Aidan is marked as Christ's own forever. This decision we make for Aidan with some responsibility. To illustrate what I mean, I want to show a short video clip.

Footnote

¹ Herbert Vorgrimler, in his *Sacramental Theology* from The Liturgical Press. Page 115.

[play clip from a Youth for Christ series on evangelism which shows parents excitedly bringing home an adopted baby and then almost immediately leaving the baby alone on the couch with a remote, bottle, fresh diaper, phone and the phone number of the restaurant the at which parents will be dining. The clip ends with the baby alone and crying.]

It's hard to even watch the seemingly loving parents leaving their newly adopted baby on the couch. Any good parent knows all the many needs a baby has. Childrearing is tough work. And I am sure that Aidan's parents, Jessica and Christopher, have already discovered that their lives are forever changed by their new arrival.

Parents have a lot of decisions to make for their children. For a long time they pick all the clothes, the food, where to live, what to do. In time, the child will have more choice. But any school-aged here this morning could test whether they are free to make their own decisions by deciding to stop going to school. It's not going to happen. Your parents make a lot of choices for you and school is one on which most parents and the government agree.

With all these decisions being made, I find it curious that parents sometimes feel they should leave kids to their own devices when it comes to matters of faith. They might put it, “My faith is important to me, and I hope my kids will be Christian, but I don't want to push it on them,” To be frank with you, that as odd to me sounds to me as saying, “My language is important to me, and I hope my kids will speak English one day, but I don't want to push it on them.”

This is why Psalm 145, which we read from earlier this morning says, “One generation shall praise your works to another and shall declare your power.” Here and elsewhere, God tells us to pass our faith along to the next generations, telling them as the Psalmist says, “The Lord is gracious and full of compassion,