

Epiphany 2, Baptism

Lections: Isaiah 49:1-7; Ps. 40:1-12; I Corin. 1:1-9; John 1:20-42

This week the lessons ask us to consider what happens after baptism, what is the nature of a vocational call, what do we seek when we proclaim our faith. The church believes that baptism is a time when the power of the Holy Spirit is placed within us by the sacramental action and that all people therefore are called to ministry; what form it might take is often a mystery but the community of faith has a role in its discovery. Gifts are given and not just for the self but for others; energy and service in the path and pattern of Jesus can be discerned in the baptismal promises we all renew each time we celebrate the welcome of a new child or adult.

As I sat with Felix's family yesterday morning they knew that he is being brought to a community of faith that will help him become a Christian. His godparents and grandparents know this too; they will model behaviour for him that is a witness to seeking the good, the result of a life lived in faith. The focus in today's texts would lead us to think we should talk about Felix's call, and our own development into mature Christians. We hear Jesus calling disciples; we hear Paul speak about his own call which is strengthened by faith in Jesus. We hear about the call of the prophet, about God knowing him before he was born. These are beautifully said and I hope you will think about them this week and continue to reflect on the trajectory of your own baptisms.

This morning I want to listen to the words of one mother who makes her child go to church years after he was born and baptized, years when it would be much easier to release him to other pursuits, to a longer rest, to no obligations because his week is already so busy. I want to share some words about why you should make Felix and Olivia come to church. I am grateful that they have been here and that Felix already thinks he's Jesus! (he was the treasured child in the Christmas pageant). In fact I told my hairdresser on Friday that I would be baptizing Jesus on Sunday – was he surprised!

"The main reason I bring my child to church is that I want to give him what I found in this world which is a path and a little light to see by. Most of the people who have what I want – which is to say, purpose, heart, balance, gratitude, joy – are people with a deep sense of spirituality. They are people in community, who pray or practice their faith; they are Buddhists, Jews, Christians – people banding together to work on themselves and for human rights. They follow a brighter light than the glimmer of their own candle; they are part of something beautiful. I saw something once from the Jewish Theological Seminary that said 'a human life is like a single letter of the alphabet. It can be meaningless. Or it can be a part of a great meaning.' Our church is filled with people who are working for peace and freedom, who are out there on the streets and inside praying and they are home writing letters, and they are at the shelters with platters of food."¹ Here in this parish that is true; Felix can look around as we can and see the beautiful work of folks who have been here a long time or who have just come. They live their faith in so many ways and are always looking and listening for what they might be called to do. This week someone sent me an email – Michele said she needs help on the altar guild and I am going to give it a try. Another parish wants to join us in providing a room for Cornerstone, the shelter being built

¹ Anne Lamott, "Why I Make Sam Go to Church"

for older homeless women. More money will be given toward the peanut butter project. Yarn, a mountain of it, was donated so that shawls made with prayer can sit on the shoulders of those who need some tending.

Felix is being baptised so that he might take his place in the great cloud of witness that has gone before us, is in the midst of us, and will live far beyond us. This is one reason for baptism; it is a radical act for Cammie and Duane, allowing him to be shaped and shared by all of us. He has come into this place to learn to 'endure the beams of love,' as Blake says. As have we all. The beams of love pray for us when we are lost or hurting; they remember the world, the nation, those in authority, those who have died. The beams of love find hearts and minds and spirits willing to share, to speak, to sing, to pray in vulnerability as well as in strength. Another parishioner said this week, "I have been put on earth to learn about not judging others" She learns more about this in community with those who God sends on her path. She continues to endure the beams of love.

"It's funny; I always imagined when I was a kid that adults had some kind of inner toolbox, full of shining tools: the saw of discernment, the hammer of wisdom, the sandpaper of patience. But then when I grew up I found that life handed you these rusty bent old tools – friendships, prayer, conscience, honesty – and said, do the best you can with these; they will have to do. And mostly, against all odds, they are enough."² Here is a group of imperfect folks and an imperfect priest; here is an old book of creeds and songs and prayers that have been said by others. You can write some yourself but you can lean on the thoughts of others when you are weary and tired and out of strength. This is why Felix should come to church beyond the day of his baptism. This is why we are still coming.

Amen+

The Rev. Dr. Linda Privitera

² Ibid