

“And That is What We Are”

Psalm 4, 1 John 3:1-7

4/13/18

My sister posted this beautiful posed photo of my nephew Beckett on Facebook last Friday. With the quote: “Three years ago this kid came into our lives and subsequently our lives were changed forever.” To say that they are smitten is an understatement. In fact, last Friday as she was typing that up, my sister Natalie and I were barreling down hwy 81 to Greenville to surprise him, shower him with love, and to snuggle indefinitely his little baby sister Laine.

It was a big weekend because Laine was baptized Sunday. People have asked how it went and I jokingly have said –great- the water made it on her head.” The water as you know symbolizes the invisible grace we know in Jesus Christ that is for Laine forever and always. But let’s be honest, while the big part of baptism is the water, it is also the community. For that reason the PCUSA makes the claim that baptism happens within the midst of a church family because the baby/child/adult is baptized INTO a community. Baptism is the beginning of the Christian life.

A good friend of mine Tom is quite repetitive in ways that I love—he always quotes scriptures as opportune liturgy- one of which is when he baptizes babies. He will often walk them down the aisle, away from the parents, and into the midst of the congregation (because that is what we are enacting in baptism—that babies are more than just their parents to raise in faith). He always quotes 1 John in saying--- “See what love God has for us-that we should be called Children of God...and that is what we are”.

And that is what we are.

Everytime I see a baby, everytime I pass a font, every time I hear an assurance of pardon, I hear Tom’s voice in my head—How great is God that God has chosen to love us. We are children of God.

Yes. US. WE. So much so today we think faith has to do with what we know in our minds or accept in our hearts or decide we want God—no, God has already decided. God has a claim on us way stronger than our claim on God. And this claim isn’t so we fly solo through life’s tumultuous waters.

When each of you were baptized, your parents made a claim—they claimed for you that Jesus was their savior and vowed, with a congregation of willing people, to raise you telling you the story of God—telling you the good news of hope the writer was preaching to the post resurrection Johanine community—see what love God has lavished us with—so much so that we are called children of God!

Psalm 4 states—“Only you oh lord make me rest in safety”

The safety that our God grants us is the safety of the other—the people that surround you at points in your life that are God incarnate—through experiences that really synthesize what it means to be a child of God.

Now confirmation this year was a learning experience- to be honest with you I hadn't had much of a confirmation when I was in high school, so it was neat to see the "St. John's" Confirmation curriculum. But us church folk—we have a bad habit of making church stuff more like "class"---like we were imparting some sort of knowledge for them to memorize and spout back to us. We were a group of people put together, some not wanting always to be there, some exhausted, some zoned out, some with far too many questions for conversations for 1 hour.

We came, we talked at them some stuff they already knew, they left. Once a week we ate, we talked, we learned some stuff we already knew or maybe learned a different way to look at it, and we went back to our lives outside of church.

Then January happened. It was pouring cold that Friday night and we all got in a suburban to drive to Honey Brook—all unsure what was ahead of us—except for maybe Dave.

Half the car thought this was a retreat where they were joining another church- and I'm gonna share a little tidbit with you—St. John's youth- they like each other. Not other people---in their cabins, in their living spaces, in their bathrooms. Fear had sunk in—I better not have to sleep in a cabin with some stranger that snores!

Then as the car rolled up to a wooden cabin deep breaths were let out. The dreaded fears subsided and they realized that they had a whole cabin to themselves with as many rice krispie treats they could eat, as many fires they could make, and as many games that they wanted to play.

We ate, we worshipped, we gathered, we laughed, I made them sing, we froze our butts off and we watched the eagles head to the super bowl and that weird movie about Steve Carrell building an ark in 2008.

And that weekend everything changed. Because we can only "teach" confirmands so much---It wasn't about what we taught them. It was about what they became and how they became family.

Our 1 John scripture is purposefully plural because the church is not I or me. The church is us. Even God is us. Three in one.

Today, Confirmation Sunday is just one Sunday amidst all of them. But the vows those people took on your baptism day on behalf of all of the church are not so that you can come week after week, have some donut holes and learn about Noah's Ark again.

Those vows were so that you might laugh until you cry with someone you barely knew 24 hours prior. That you might find comfort in the arms of someone when tears fill your eyes as you grieve the loss of a friend. That you might truly learn what it means to have a relationship with God by watching a grown man share his experience of growing at St. John's.

Today you affirm WHO you are and WHOSE you are. For some it might be a reminder. For some it might be the first time you've said it out loud. For others you might find that it doesn't feel much different other than the sugar high from the Costco cake or the blessing your parents gave you.

But one day, God is going to surround you with people, people you dine with, people you trust, people that challenge you, people that walk a path with you couldn't walk alone on and you will see yourself saying the words of the psalmist.

With you God, only you- assure my safe sleeping.

So Michael, Darien, Sophie, Matthew, Abi

Go from this place knowing who you are and whose you are and the people that taught it and will continue to teach you what it means. Because these people—we are the people that are here now on this journey with you—and we get to ask the questions with you. We aren't here to tell you how to do this life. We are here to do the life with you.

WE are Children of God. THAT IS WHAT WE ARE.

And thanks be to god because of it.