

Roger Nelson Sermon Jan 10, 2010

I want you to close your eyes. I want you to close your eyes because I want you for the next couple of minutes to leave yourself behind – your thoughts and concerns. I want you to imagine that you are one of the two young children – either Bree or Charles – who are about to be baptized here this morning.

You were at one time in your life exactly where they are now: newly born, unable to comprehend quite where you were or to understand what was being said. Few of us remember our baptism except through family pictures and lore. It is a distant blur, this first encounter we had with God's grace and love; yet it remains the foundation for whatever spiritual life we have now.

So close your eyes, relax your body, quiet your mind, and after a brief silence, hear these words read today from the Hebrew prophet Isaiah. Hear them as among the first communication you ever had with the Lord your God; garbled and unintelligible then as a baby, but clear as a bell now that you are an adult. Listen to these words spoken as your journey through life was just beginning.

“Now thus says the Lord, he who created you . . . he who formed you . . . Do not fear for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you. For I am the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior.”

You can slowly open your eyes now, slowly come back to yourself, to who you are now.

If you are a teenager, come back to the pressures and the new wonders that fill these years of your lives. If you are a young adult, come back to the anxieties and joys that accompany finding a vocation or a life partner. If you are the parents of children, come back to the worries and the rewards of nurturing growing human beings. If you are an empty nester, come back to the unknowns and the excitement of forming a new life for yourselves. If you are an elder, come back to the shriveled hands and aching joints that herald both the fear of death and the reward of eternal life.

Hopefully you will come back to who you are now with a new perspective – a perspective that from the very first moment of your life, certainly from your baptism on, you have been cared for and protected and loved by God beyond all your imagination. How comfortable and reassuring it is, even years after the event, to realize that your life in the Lord began with his Words: “Do not fear, for I have redeemed you.” And the promise that “I will be with you”; through the waters and the fire of your lives that may threaten you, they will not be allowed to overwhelm you. And the declaration “I am the Lord your God . . . your Savior.”

It is too bad in a way that young Bree and Charles cannot hear and understand that is being said to them this morning. It will be up to their parents and godparents to convey this message of divine love to them. But even if they could comprehend the words spoken to them, they would still, at their young age, lack the experience to put these words into the context of their lives.

But we have the experience of life. We can hear these words in the context of what has occurred and what is happening in our lives, now and in the past. We have known what it is like to be nearly overwhelmed by the waters. We have been through times in our lives when the flames have come close to consuming us. And we have survived, sometimes by our own wits, but most of the time because we have sealed in Baptism and marked as Christ's own forever. The Lord our God is tenacious in not letting us go; we are his people, and she is our God.

Craig, Kristen, Janis, Wendy-Christopher, Caro, Meredith, William
Thank you for bringing your young child here this morning that he may become, along with us, members of God's family, vessels of grace in this world, and inheritors of the kingdom in the world to come. Thank you for entrusting them to our care and we promise to help you raise them in a community that loves God and serves others in God's Name. And thank you for giving each of us the opportunity to go back in time and hear again as infants God's promises to us. The baptism of your children allows us to renew our own baptismal vows and to hear afresh God's promise to us:

“Do not fear . . . I will be with you . . . I am your Savior.”