

Pastor Roy's Sermon from June 10, 2012

Grace to you and peace, from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Our welcome into the family of God is our Baptism. Baptism is the sign that we have been joined to the love, friendship, and unity of God. In baptism we are cleansed, we are washed, forgiven, named a child of God.

Some churches understand baptism to be a confession of faith in God's mercy and salvation. They focus on baptism as a step of faith--a symbol of faith—an ordinance of the church. These churches tend to baptize youth and adults who are able to confess their own faith.

Other churches, including the Lutheran church, have a different understanding of baptism. For us, baptism is not a symbol but a sign. In baptism we see not primarily a personal confession of faith, but the action of God. God acts in the water with the Word of God. God speaks in baptism of a new reality that names the baptized as “child of God.” Baptism proclaims the promise of God: You ARE a child of God. You ARE cleansed. You ARE beloved, forgiven, embraced forever. You ARE free.

The baptized no longer needs to seek to be saved or fear losing that salvation. No need to continue keeping score of how much you owe God. No need to convince God or any of the rest of us that you are ok. We ARE ok before God and that is all that matters. We are created by God for Grace. In water we find life. Every time we touch water, drink water, bathe, see the rain, we are reminded that we are beloved of God. Perfectly freed by love to love freely with no strings attached. No judgment, No fear, No Shame. In water we confess our cleansing from sin, our brokenness, our despair.

Put simply, when the water touches our head and the Word of God's promise is proclaimed, we are claimed by God. From that point on, if we ever doubt or wonder, or aren't quite sure whether we are good enough, we can remember the water and the Word and know that we are a beloved child of God.

That is what baptism does. Baptism is not about me and my ability to comprehend and define God's mercy and be faithful to that mercy. Baptism is about God naming me, far beyond my ability to grasp it,--a beloved child of grace. That is why we baptize infants. Its not about me. Its not about you. Its about God. God's promise creates my identity. It names me. Nothing I say, think, or do can dissolve or destroy that identity.

The embrace of God is without limit. Yes, sometimes we fail to understand and accept it, but that does not limit the unconditional love of God. Baptism is our sign. Baptism is God's welcome to the most gracious and loving family ever. Communion also reminds us that we are beloved by God. That Jesus gives of his body and blood freely. A sign of our Lord's presence--a celebration of freedom and peace. Neither baptism nor communion are a judgment or warning that we had better get it right. Instead, they are God's blessing of peace proclaimed for all who can receive it. God's mercy is wide and open. In it we are freed to be those people whom God created us to be.

Thanks be to God for the sacrament of baptism. May it be a source of strength for all of us. Amen.