

“Baptism—God at Work”

Ninth Sunday after Pentecost

Romans 10:5-17

“So faith comes from hearing; hearing through the Word of Christ” Romans 10:17

This morning we as a congregation witnessed our God in action. We witnessed God working through his Holy Word and ordinary water to put his name and claim on four individuals and call them to be a part of the household of God, the Church. Our Heavenly Father made a promise to four individuals. And we all rejoiced with the angels in heaven. Our God made a promise that, because of their trust in Jesus and his death and resurrection on their behalf, they have a right relationship with him. They are reconciled to their heavenly Father. He made a promise that he will never leave these four individuals nor forsake them. He made a promise that they have an eternal home together with him in the new heavens and the new earth. He made a promise that nothing, no one, can pluck them from his hand. Our God in action. *Baptism—God at work.*

But how can we be so certain that God has taken action this morning to save these four and give them eternal safety in Christ? Three of those baptized were children. Don't we have to see some visible or verbal sign that they even believe in Jesus or understand what is going on? After all, the Apostle Paul told us in the Epistle lesson to the Romans this morning that “*if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead you will be saved*” (Rom 10:10). Elsewhere he says, “*Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved*” (Rom 10:13, emphasis mine). Can we truly say that children like Amelia, Audrey, and Eliana (we can leave Karl out of the category of child, right?) have confessed with their mouths that Jesus is Lord and believed in their hearts that God raised Jesus from the dead? Can we truly say that these three little ones have called on the name of the Lord? How then is it that we as a congregation can be so confident that they are actually saved?

This is the question we have on our hands this morning. How can we be so confident that through Baptism God works to save even those who cannot give any clear verbal or visible sign that they believe in Jesus? It is the question that has arisen not only from the context of our Worship Service this morning, but it is also the question that our brief section from Paul's letter to the Romans asks and wants to answer. So let us pursue the answer.

The short answer is, “We can be confident that God works through Baptism and has taken action to save even these little ones *because through the waters of Baptism they had a definitive, visible experience with the Word of God.*” Even when the youngest, weakest, and most fragile of individuals have a definitive, visible experience with the Word of God he works to create and sustain faith and belief in Jesus. This is true because the Spirit of God is active in the water and through his Word. The Holy Spirit works through the instruments of God, like Baptism, to create and sustain faith and belief (1 Corinthians 2:14; 1 Corinthians 12:3; John 3:5; Acts 2:38-39; Titus 3:5). Our human mind may not be able to understand this mystery of God. We may be skeptical. But as our Lord himself declares concerning

the wondrous work of God in this world, "With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible" (Mt 19:26). So "we walk by faith and not by sight" (2 Corinthians 5:7).

So what is it about this Word of God that makes it so special? The Word of God is special because it is different than any human word in at least three important ways. It is *a Word of promise, a Word that performs, and a Word that is powerful.*

First, the Word of God that is given in baptism and attached to ordinary water is a *Word of promise.* God has always spoken a Word of promise. God has also always worked within human history to fulfill his Word of promise. He has a perfect track record.

At the Fall of mankind in the Garden of Eden our God promised that he would send one who would rule and reign over all the enemies of God in this world and all that separates us from God. The enemies we call Sin, death, Hell, and Satan. The dangerous enemies that are, perhaps, most dangerous because we can often spend so much time and effort pretending they are not serious and dangerous. Yet, God says differently. This is why he sets out a salvation plan to do battle with and defeat these greatest of enemies. In Genesis 3:15 God declares to Satan disguised as the serpent, "He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel." Through Jesus' cross and resurrection God fulfilled that promise made in the Garden. And so the Apostle Paul confirms it in Romans 16:20, "The God of peace crushes Satan under your feet."

Later in Genesis God made a promise to Noah that he would never again destroy all creation in judgment. By placing the judgment of all mankind upon one man, our God made eternal salvation possible for all who believe and are baptized (Gen 8:21). Far from destroying all creation, God abandoned, forsook, and sentenced to Hell and damnation the only begotten, uncreated, eternal human being so that his Promise to Noah is kept.

Still in the Book of Genesis we read of God first making a promise to Abraham that Israel, his children, would be blessed as a great nation with a great number of offspring from many nations to live in a great land (Genesis 12:1-3, 7; 15:18; 17:5-8). God sealed this promise with the covenant or sacrament of circumcision (Genesis 17:9-14). In the fullness of time God fulfilled this promise first made to Abraham by calling a multitude of offspring from all nations and adopting them in Christ as children of God through another Sacrament we call Holy Baptism (Colossians 2:11-12). Now the Church is the Israel of God (Galatians 6:16). You and I and all who believe and are baptized, live as the New Israel in the land we call Christ and partake of the fruit of that land in the waters of Baptism and the bread and the wine of the Lord's Supper. The promise fulfilled. Yes, everyone who is baptized has a definitive, visible experience with the Word of God that is a Word of promise.

Second, the Word of God that is given in Baptism and attached to ordinary water is a *Word that performs.* That is, it is a Word that does what it says. Just as we can believe that when God makes a promise he will certainly keep it, so also we can believe that when God speaks, things happen. In fact, good things happen. God speaks to bring about blessings, healings, forgiveness, and new, resurrection life, to name a few of the good things.

Consider just a short list of the things that happened simply because Jesus spoke a Word. During his Ministry he said to a Centurion, "Go let it be done for you," and the healing was done (Mt 8:13). He said to the winds and the waves, "Be still," and they were stilled (Mk 4:39). He said to the demons, "Be quiet and come out of him," and they left (Lk 4:35). He spoke to a paralytic "Take heart, your sins are

forgiven,” and they were forgiven (Mt 9:2). He spoke a blessing over a few loaves of bread and some fish and fed five thousand people (Lk 9:10-17). God’s Word is a Word that performs. It does what it says. So when God’s Word and name is spoken through the waters of Holy Baptism and placed on each baptized child, we can trust that God does what he says. He names and claims them. The baptized individual is his child. Yes, everyone who is baptized has a definitive, visible experience with the Word of God which is a Word that performs.

Third, the Word of God that is given in Baptism and attached to ordinary water is a *Word that is powerful*. Some of you may know that our English word, “dynamite,” is transliterated from the Greek word *dunamis*. As you can expect, *dunamis* typically means “powerful.” I bring this up because this is how Holy Scripture describes God’s Word. In Romans 1:16 we read that the Gospel, the good news or good word of Jesus Christ, is the *power* (the *dunamis*) of God for salvation to everyone who believes. Yes, everyone who is baptized has a definitive, visible experience with the Word of God that is a powerful Word. A Word that creates faith through the Spirit of God and, with it, brings salvation.

In summary, when any person is baptized, regardless of age or any other defining characteristic, we can trust that the individual is having *a definitive, visible experience with the Word of God that is a Word of promise, a Word that performs, and a Word that is powerful*. This means that when an individual, like the four baptized this morning, have a *definitive experience* with the Word of God, they are also having an experience with their Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. They are meeting Jesus.

Paul reminds us at the very end of our reading that the Word of God is first and foremost the person of Jesus (Rom 10:17). The Evangelist St. John tells us that “in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God” (John 1:1). Later he tells us that the “Word became flesh and dwelt among us” in the person of Jesus (John 1:14). When anyone receives a Christian Baptism in the name of God, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, they meet Jesus through the water and the Word. They meet the Jesus who is *the promised one*. They meet the Jesus who *speaks and makes things happen*. They meet the Jesus who is *powerful*. As Paul tells us earlier on in Romans, “Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life” (Romans 6:4-6). In Galatians Paul reminds us that, like a garment, the baptized person “puts on Jesus” (Galatians 3:27). They participate in his crucifixion and resurrection. They received a rebirth and renewal (Titus 3:5), born again into the kingdom of God, the household of God (John 3:5).

So let us as the baptized, believing children of God continue to have definitive, visible experiences with the Word of God that is *a Word of promise, a Word that performs, and a Word that is powerful*. A Word that is Christ. Let us continue to meet him where we can be absolutely certain he meets us. The hearing of the Word. The Waters of Baptism. The bread and wine of the Lord’s Supper. In those places let us believe more firmly that our God acts to create and sustain faith that brings salvation. We can even imagine little “God at Work” signs hanging from the baptismal font, the pulpit, the lectern, and the altar. Perhaps God can continue to use you and me to arrange some appointments for others. Amen.