

BAPTISM MEDITATION . . .

Henri Nouwen once asked this powerful question . . .

“What can we say about God’s love?”

Then he answers his own question:

“We can say that God’s love is unconditional.

God does not say, ‘I love you, if. . . ‘

There are no ifs in God’s heart.

God’s love for us does not depend

on what we do or say, on our looks or intelligence,

on our success or popularity.

God’s love for us existed before we were born

and will exist after we have died.

God’s love is from eternity to eternity

and is not bound to any time-related event

or circumstance.

Does that mean that God does not care

what we do or say?” Nouwen asks.

“No,” he says, “because God’s love

wouldn’t be real if God didn’t care.

To love without condition does not mean

to love without concern.

God desires to enter into relationship with us

and wants us to love God in return.”

Then, like he’s looking us in the eye,

Nouwen challenges us:

“Let’s dare to enter into an intimate relationship

with God without fear,

trusting that we will receive love

and always more love.” (Bread for the Journey, Feb 5)

So on this day . . .

the day of his baptism in the Holy waters of our Lord . . .

I want to dare little Elijah Peter Spee

to grow into that intimate relationship with God . . .

trusting that the love of his Creator

has always been with him . . .

will always be with him . . .

and will continue to be with him forever.

Now you may wonder . . .

how can I challenge a little baby to comprehend

something so overwhelming

like the love of our Lord.

Isn't it a little bit early to be charging him
to do something like that . . .
I mean, really . . . cut him a little slack pastor.

But I say no . . .
it is always a wonderful thing to share
the unconditional love of God with anyone . . .
no matter what age . . .
it doesn't matter whether you think
someone is too young to understand it . . .

or even if you believe someone is too feeble with age
to comprehend anything . . .
we are still called to share the love of our God
with anyone . . . at any time . . . and in anyplace.

Did you hear the words of the psalmist . . .
crying out to the people to remember
that everything wonderful comes from God . . .
that God blesses us with everything
we could ever need . . .
and that God never forgets anyone . . .
from the youngest little baby boy
who is about to be baptized in the waters
to the elderly saint who is about
to cross over the river and go home to the Lord . . .
Did you hear those words . . .
do you understand that God's covenant . . .
God's pledge to love all of humanity . . .
includes you, too . . .

everyone here this morning
is just as blessed and loved by our Lord and Savior.

Now you might say that this all sounds
like some sort of "pie in the sky" theology
that merely sings praises to God
while ignoring the pain and brokenness in the world.
Maybe you wonder,
"How can I sing praises in the midst of despair . . .
pain . . . suffering . . . and grief."

And I have to answer . . .
how can I not?

Even Nouwen acknowledges . . .

“Our life is full of brokenness – broken relationships,
broken promises, broken expectations.

How can we live with that brokenness

without becoming bitter and resentful . . .

except by returning again and again

to God’s faithful presence in our lives?”

And that’s just the point . . .

the psalmist’s praises are there to remind us

to remember . . .

to remember that God has always been faithful . . .

even in our darkest moments.

Singing God’s praises helps us

to fill those empty dark places in our lives . . .

to fill the gaps between doubt and faith . . .

desperation and hope . . .

between despair and expectation . . .

between sorrow and joy . . .

between fear and compassion . . .

between anger and love . . .

God’s praises call us to remember . . .

that we do not go through this world alone . . .

and that we will never be forsaken.

So when the waters flow down

over Elijah’s head this morning . . .

we will witness what God is doing

in the life of this little boy . . .

we will remember what God is doing in our own lives . . .

. and we will sing praise to God.

PAUSE

Arianne and Jon . . . and all of you here . . .

in this Holy moment we are called

to share with Elijah the love of God . . .

now and forever . . .

it is our calling . . . as parents . . .

as Ruling and Teaching Elders . . .

and as members of this entire Christian community . . .

we are to do what we were commanded

by the Lord to do so a long time ago . . .

just as we are told to do in the Hebrew scriptures . . .

Deuteronomy chapter 6 . . .

also known as the Shema

- 4 Hear, O Israel: The Lord is our God, the Lord alone.
5 You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart,
and with all your soul, and with all your might.
6 Keep these words that I am commanding you today
in your heart.
7 Recite them to your children
and talk about them when you are at home
and when you are away,
when you lie down and when you rise.
8 Bind them as a sign on your hand,
fix them as an emblem on your forehead,
9 and write them on the doorposts of your house
and on your gates.

So as we prepare to witness Elijah's baptism . . .
as well as remembering our own . . .
let us also remember the glory of our loving Creator . . .
. let us remember that in this life . . .
even with all of its uncertainties . . .
all of its pain and suffering . . .

God is still with us and can bring us
a sense of peace that truly passes all understanding . . .
and in our remembering . . .

may we pledge to share what we remember
with this young baby boy . . .
as he begins a wonderful journey now . . .
through the waters . . .
and into the promises of his loving God.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.