

Marc Steele (3)

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Preacher: Deacon Marc Steele

[0:00] The words of Jeremiah, the son of Hilkiah, one of the priests who were in Anathoth in the land of Benjamin.

Now the word of the Lord came to me, saying, Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you, and before you were born, I consecrated you. I appointed you a prophet to the nations.

Then I said, O Lord God, behold, I do not know how to speak, for I am only a youth. But the Lord said to me, Do not say I am only a youth, for to all to whom I send you, you shall go, and whatever I command you, you shall speak. Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you to deliver you, declares the Lord.

In the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. To my daughter Selah, on the occasion of her baptism.

To you, sweet girl, grace to you in the name of the Lord. We gather together to baptize you in the name of our triune God, to usher you into Jesus' body, his church.

[1:16] It is especially fitting that we gather in this building, this parish. It was here that you were prayed for in the undercroft beneath our feet.

Two co-conspirators gathered together just over a year ago to pray for a girl to be born into our family. Your mother and I laughed like Sarah did when the angels announced the future birth of Isaac.

Yet here you are. God works according to his will and purpose. The idea of you was a source of mirth for our family, but the reality of you has become a fountain of joy.

God has made a practice of creating life for the express purpose of bringing glory to his name. God has made a practice of prayer. Today he recognizes that calling as he sets you apart through this baptism, this consecration, this placement into the family of God.

Your baptism will serve as both a signifier and an agent of your calling. In simpler language, dear girl, the pouring of the sacred water upon your head will both set you apart and announce it to the world.

[2:39] It is God who ordained this practice. As strange as what is about to happen may seem to you, God has marked his chosen people in visible ways since the time of the patriarchs.

All those who place their faith in Christ become strangers in this dark world, looking forward to the one yet to come. Your mother and I are joined together as pilgrims.

We have, in a sense, embarked upon our own exodus in a journey towards a city that has foundations, whose builder and designer is God. Pilgrims and sojourners do not enter this journey of faith alone.

They commit everything they have to the cause of Christ. Selah, child, you were given to us as a gift to steward and raise in the discipline and admonition of the Lord.

You join our other precious gifts, Xavier, Leah, Gaius, Shoshanna, and Trevor, during this part of our journey. Here is the bottom line.

[3:56] Pilgrims don't leave their children behind in the land of Ur, the land of Sodom, the land of Egypt, and the land of Babylon, when the Lord calls them out on the path of deliverance. Pilgrims, the girl, consider the call of Abraham.

With him came his children. As is written, By faith Abraham obeyed, and when he was called out to go to a place, that he was to receive his inheritance.

And he went out not knowing where he was going. By faith he went to live in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, living in tents, with Isaac and Jacob, heirs with him of the same promise.

Every pilgrim called to walk with God was marked with the sign of the covenant. For Abraham's children, that sign was circumcision. It marked the uniqueness of the children of God, separating

them from the pagan world around them.

This continued with the biological children of Abraham, but something amazing occurred. During the time of Abraham, the time of Moses, when God in his grace called Gentile pagans into this covenant relationship with them, they too were given the sign of the covenant with the full benefits of membership within the covenant community.

[5:20] Them and their children. To establish this, God spoke to his high priest Aaron and his prophet Moses, saying, If a stranger should sojourn with you and would keep the Passover to the Lord, let all his males be circumcised.

Then he may come near and keep it. He shall be as a native of the land, but no uncircumcised person shall eat of it. When Christ, our Passover lamb, became flesh and dwelt among us, atoning for our sins and giving us the guarantee of the resurrection, the promise given to Abraham was now offered by our Lord and Savior to every tribe and nation.

In one of his final commandments during his ministry on this earth, he charged his apostles to go out into all the world and make disciples with a new sign of the covenant, baptism in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching this new batch of sojourners and pilgrims to obey all that Jesus had commanded them.

And this baptism conveys to you, daughter, the full benefits of our Passover, Jesus. Christ fed the covenant children of Israel in the Passover and through the trials of Exodus.

As is written by the Apostle Paul, I do not want you to be unaware, brothers, that our fathers were all under the cloud and all passed through the sea and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea.

[6:58] And all ate the same spiritual food and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from the spiritual rock that followed them and the rock was Christ. As you are baptized into Christ, you will be provided the same opportunities to meet Jesus at the table in his covenant community, to feed on him in your heart by faith.

Selah, today you are becoming part of our tribe, a group of pilgrims following our forerunner, Jesus. In the history of the church, many such have had this mark of the covenant placed upon them. It's the first action taken when Philip preached the gospel of Jesus to the Ethiopian eunuch. See, here is water. What prevents me from being baptized?

Over and over again through the New Testament, as people came to faith in Christ, they left their pagan world for Jesus. Their entire household were washed and separated through baptism. Notably in Philippi, Paul baptized the house of Lydia and then, amazingly, the household of his own jailer.

Peter baptized the household of Cornelius in Caesarea. In Corinth, Paul baptized the house of Stephanas. And so our salvation history continued.

[8:15] Families from every tribe and nation joining with Abraham's family as heirs of this promise. As it is written, in the scripture foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, In you shall all the nations be blessed.

So then those who are of faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith. Selah, a word of warning.

Baptism starts your journey of life with us as Christians. It is a gift from God, but we cannot finish the journey for you. As you grow up into a beautiful, independent woman, you must choose for yourself what you are going to do with the gospel of Christ.

Both the Old and the New Testaments speak of those who walk away from their covenant vows. As a matter of fact, Paul spoke of that generation who walked through the cloud and walked through the sea as one that the majority of which walked away from faith and entered into judgment.

What we do today will not save your soul. Rather, it is God's way of pointing you, leading you into salvation. Girl, there was never a time in the life of those sealed by the sign of the covenant of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and onward, where they did not understand that the only place under heaven where salvation is to be found is in the name of the Lord Most High.

[10:03] The very nature and makeup of the covenant community preaches the gospel daily to those it nourishes. From birth to death.

In addition to the vows that your mother and I are about to take, I stand here now in front of these witnesses to tell you I will lay down my life even to death to make sure that both you and your brothers and sisters are raised in a house that honors and exalts God as he has revealed himself in

his word.

There will never be a time in your life that you don't know that Jesus is the only way to the Father.
and we will not walk as a family of faith alone.

Baptism does not just join you to the covenant community, it also joins the covenant community to you. The church, because of your baptism, will be able to worship fully with you, discipline you, nurture you.

Together you'll be knit into one body. They will love you. They will carry you when you fall. You will face life's greatest joys and disappointments with them.

[11:18] For this reason, I charge those in our presence today that the liturgy we are about to embark on also holds the congregation responsible to raise our daughter in truth. Just as Calvin and Elaine will stand as godparents to make sure that Corleen and I follow through on what we promise, I will be watching to make sure that you follow through on the commitment you were about to make.

I ask that you make your response without mental reservation, committing yourself to walk with Selah in her Christian walk as mentors and examples in the faith, once and for all delivered to the saints, the Lord being your helper.

Daughter, you have the privilege of being baptized by two men who have served as spiritual fathers to me. You will hear this when I address them formally as my right Reverend Father in God, David Benna, or Reverend Father Caleb Evans.

These two men have guided me well in the faith. You will hear the love I have for them in my voice when I speak of them less formally. They will love you well and guide me as I lead our home.

But you are blessed with this congregation. Here is a place with many mature spiritual fathers and mothers who will pour their lives into you. I beg you, girl, submit yourselves to their leadership.

[12:45] You will not regret it. Finally, Selah, we live in a dark time. We live in a world that thinks the steps we are taking today to baptize you and make you a disciple of Jesus is wrong.

That you are too young that you should be raised to taste the wickedness of the world and then make a decision about what path to walk. here is the reality. What happens today is not a work of man.

It is a work of the sovereign triune God. You don't belong to me. You don't even belong to yourself. You belong to him and he lays claim on you.

I will not interfere with such a call. And you are never too young to follow him in faith. There are those who tried to keep the children away from Jesus.

He condemned them, drew the children to his side, taught them and blessed them. He is doing the same thing here at the Church of the Holy Trinity today.

[13:55] In our psalm reading, we found that God has placed his praises in the mouths of infants. Selah, last month, your mother noticed something beautiful. As we came to worship weekly, you began to join in the singing of the hymns.

You sing songs of praise to the sweet Jesus you love so much. My daughter, never lose that song. In Christ, the Reverend Deacon Mark Steele, or as you know me, Dad.

In the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen. May we have the baptismal party please come forward.

Amen. If you are visitors today, you will notice that we do baptize little people.

But we baptize little people based on the faithfulness of the parents of Jesus Christ with their promise that they will raise that little person so that at some point in her life she may make a public declaration of Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior and be brought forward to the bishop of the country.

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